

Dialogue in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*

A Look at Dialogue in Adaptations

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Abstract

In Cormac McCarthy's writing dialogue and spoken words are often kept short and precise. Saying as little as possible, without revealing too much. In terms of dialogue, what then is said becomes essential for the reader in order to understand themes and characters in the novel. In this thesis the dialogue from the novels *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* will be analysed and compared with the cinematic versions. How does dialogue adapt and change for the audience of a film compared to the reader of a novel? When so little is said in the novel, yet with a lot of meaning, how can dialogue be adapted to the cinematic screen without compromising the meaning behind?

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INTRODUCTION

Both *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy are two relatively new novels and films. *No Country for Old Men* was released as a book on the 19th of July 2005 and as a movie on the 9th of November 2007. From the very beginning the adaptation was critically acclaimed. Robert Bradshaw found that the Joel and Ethan Coen made “...their best since *The Man Who Wasn't There* in 2001 - and it's the best of their career so far.” (Bradshaw 2008). Winning four Oscars in 2008, including Best Motion Picture, Best writing, and adapted screenplay, the movie succeeded both with the viewers and the reviewers. *No Country for Old Men* is set in Texas during the 1970s, the reader meets Llewelyn Moss, Anton Chigurh and Ed Tom Bell as the main characters. Moss (played by Josh Brolin) is a Vietnam War veteran who stumbles across money from a drug deal that has not gone as planned while he is out hunting antelopes. He decides to take the money, but later returns to the scene of the crime and becomes hunted by Chigurh (Javier Bardem). Chigurh is a hit-man rented by the people who want their money and cocaine back. Audience and readers understand that Chigurh is a person it is impossible to beat. As Ben Walters and J.M Tyree said in their review of the movie: “Patient, implacable and ultra-capable, Chigurh is also alien, even supernatural in his presumptive superiority” (Walters, Tyree 2008). Another character is the local Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) who is the narrator in novel and film and tries to keep up with the events around him. However, it becomes clear that he is not capable of completing his task as a Sheriff and may not even want to. As Walters and Tyree rightly points out: “Sheriff Bell - ultimately shrink from confronting evil” (Walters, Tyree 2008).

Thematically both novel and film are pessimistic and rather nihilistic. Paul Ardent commented on how well this works for both the Coen brothers and McCarthy “it is a

magnificent return to form, transplanting the despairing nihilism and tar-black humour of *Fargo* to the arid plains of *Blood Simple*” (Arden 2008). Arden sees the connection between previous work by the Coen brothers and the literary form of McCarthy. He suggests that *No Country for Old Men* is a film that is melted together from two other well acclaimed Coen brothers movies. *Fargo* (1996) and *Blood Simple* (1984). In *No Country for Old Men* free will and goodness, represented by Ed Tom Bell, do not stand much of a chance compared to the brutality and evil represented by Anton Chigurh. “Of no immediately identifiable race, he's resourceful, relentless, psychopathic, a primeval figure seemingly sent by the devil to challenge the human decency of Sheriff Bell” (French 2008). It becomes evident that those who try and stand against Chigurh, do not live long. Thematically the adaptation is true to the original, “Mr. McCarthy has reportedly praised the movie for remaining faithful to the book” (Sarris 2007).

In his later works McCarthy has used a style of writing with little description and no elaborate use of language. As Jason Cowley mentions “the style of late-period McCarthy - he was born in 1933 - is characterised by its philosophical pessimism, pared-down sentences and restrained vocabulary” (Cowley 2008). Therefore, the key to understand events, characters and plot in McCarthy's work lies in dialogue. The use of dialogue in books by McCarthy is not elaborate, utterances are kept short and precise and many critics argue that this is perfect for the cinema-screen. The same goes for *No Country for Old Men*. “Much of the novel reads like a ready-made movie script. There's minimal descriptive scene-setting and long sections of vigorous dialogue, which the Coens have put straight into the actors' mouths.” (Cowley 2008). Although dialogues in both novel and film are vigorous, in the adaptation they are not as long as in the novel and moral justifications for actions performed by the characters in the novel, are left out in the adaptation. When descriptive language is kept to a minimum, dialogue becomes essential for the reader in order to understand the novel. So what then

happens when much of the dialogues in the adaptation is shorter compared to the original? Does the audience understand the actions of the characters when much of what they say is vigorous and brief?

The Road was McCarthy's first novel after *No Country for Old Men*. It was released on the 26th of September 2006 and the adaptation on the 25th of November 2009. *The Road* is arguably the book that has made McCarthy the famous American writer he is today. Not only was he awarded the Pulitzer Prize for it, it was also surprisingly picked by Oprah Winfrey's Book Club, making it a best seller. As Crowley puts it "suddenly it seemed as if McCarthy was the most famous writer in America: profiled, reappraised, gossiped about, Oprah'd, but, most importantly, read" (Crowley 2008). In *The Road* we follow a man and his son as they walk through a post-apocalyptic world. The father tries to keep them alive by educating his son as they move along towards the coast in the hope to find shelter, warmth and other good people. As they walk along they encounter many dangers in the ashen landscape, cannibalism, gangs and terrible weather. In the end, the father dies, but hope remains with his son who encounters another family and therefore may keep the good of the world going.

Several reviewers commented on *The Road* being the world after what happened in *No Country for Old Men*. Perhaps all of McCarthy's work has been leading up to this as Mark Holcomb mentions "have all of Cormac McCarthy's fictional odysseys been leading to this, a world blasted gray and featureless by human folly and cosmic indifference, inhabited only by pitiless predators and (arguably) lucky survivors?" (Holcomb 2006). *The Road* certainly is not the most joyful story, however it ends on a more positive note than other works by McCarthy and it leaves the reader thematically with a few options to consider. Once again, the battle between good and evil becomes evident. However, as McCarthy himself said (in a rare interview) "the message readers might take away from 'The Road,' he said, is that one should "simply care about things and people and be more appreciative" (Conion 2007). So arguably

there is more focus on the nature of humans, what is wrong with the American society now and how it can improve. Holcomb comments about the strength of McCarthy's writing that: "The genius of Mc- Carthy's work, whether you find it risible or profound, is in its bold, seamless melding of private revelation, cultural insight, and unabashed philosophizing" (Holcomb 2006). *The Road* leaves the reader with a cold and gloomy world, yet with affection between families.

The dialogue of *The Road* when compared to *No Country for Old Men* is perhaps not as vigorous and long, but it is without any attempt to cover up the truth about the state of the world. At the same time the compassion between father and son comes across. Director John Hillcoat and screenwriter Joe Pennhal had a problem with this. If the mise-en-scene of the movie is supposed to be dark and gloomy and much of the dialogue is the same, how can they depict the compassion that is between father and son without using dialogue from the novel? Does the adaptation of *The Road* communicate the sadness of the story while still managing to maintain hope? Another issue is how the narrative role of the father and the flashbacks are transferred from novel to film so that they function in the same way as they do in the novel offering an insight into the world that used to be and giving¹⁰ the reader a counterpoint to the world they are seeing now.

CHAPTER I: ADAPTATION THEORY

There are several different theoretical approaches when dealing with adaptations and the field of study is vast. The theory this thesis is based on focuses on understanding dialogue and putting it into the correct context. What is essential to remember when dealing with adaptation theory is that the cinema, and the literary, profession as well are in constant development and therefore finding a theory that covers all necessary aspects is difficult. Arguably, this is the reason why most theoretical books concerning adaptations add examples from specific movies to underline their theory. Another difficulty when dealing with theory about both literature and cinema is that specific rules are not always followed. What may be illustrated as a rule never to be broken may just as well be broken as long as it is broken consistently.

To understand dialogue in adaptations, dialogue theory alone is not enough. Audience, role of author, adaptation and narrative theory are needed as supplements. After all, dialogue does not stand on its own in either literature or film. What follows is an outline of the theory that provides a background for the this thesis.

Adaptation Theory

An adaptation can be defined as “...a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing” (Hutcheon 2006: 9). Broadly speaking there are three different types of adaptations. Imelda Whelehan mentions Geoffrey Wagner in the book *Adaptations - From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* and how he was one of the first to analyse the different types of adaptations that exist. First, transposition - “A novel directly given on screen”, second, commentary “where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect” and third, analogy: “a film that shifts the action of the fiction forward in time or otherwise changes its essential context; analogy goes

further than shifting a scene or playing with the end, and must transplant the whole scenario so that little of the original is identifiable” (Whelehan 1999: 8). Normally, a movie does not directly adapt the novel straight to film. The novel is too long for that and the result would be a way too long movie which presumably would bore the audience quickly. However, it is possible to adapt a novel, cut down on content, but still keep the meaning and impression true to the original.

The Road is a movie which would be classified as a transposition. There are not a lot of changes from novel to film. Whereas *No Country for Old Men* is obviously closer to a commentary adaptation as it is altered in a few ways, but still true to the novel it is adapted from.

Narrative and Narrator in Adaptations

A trend with theoretical adaptation books is that they first deal with a movie and then try to explain the theory behind, underlining the points made. Fewer work with the concept of dealing with theoretical aspects first and then go on to find the movie to adapt the theory to. *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction* by Jakob Lothe is one of few books to start out with theory and then move on to examples from movies, with firstly finding general theoretical aspects to adaptations, then looking at movies and how issues have been solved cinematically. Lothe’s book will be the background for my theoretical chapter together with extracts and examples from other notable books about film adaptations.

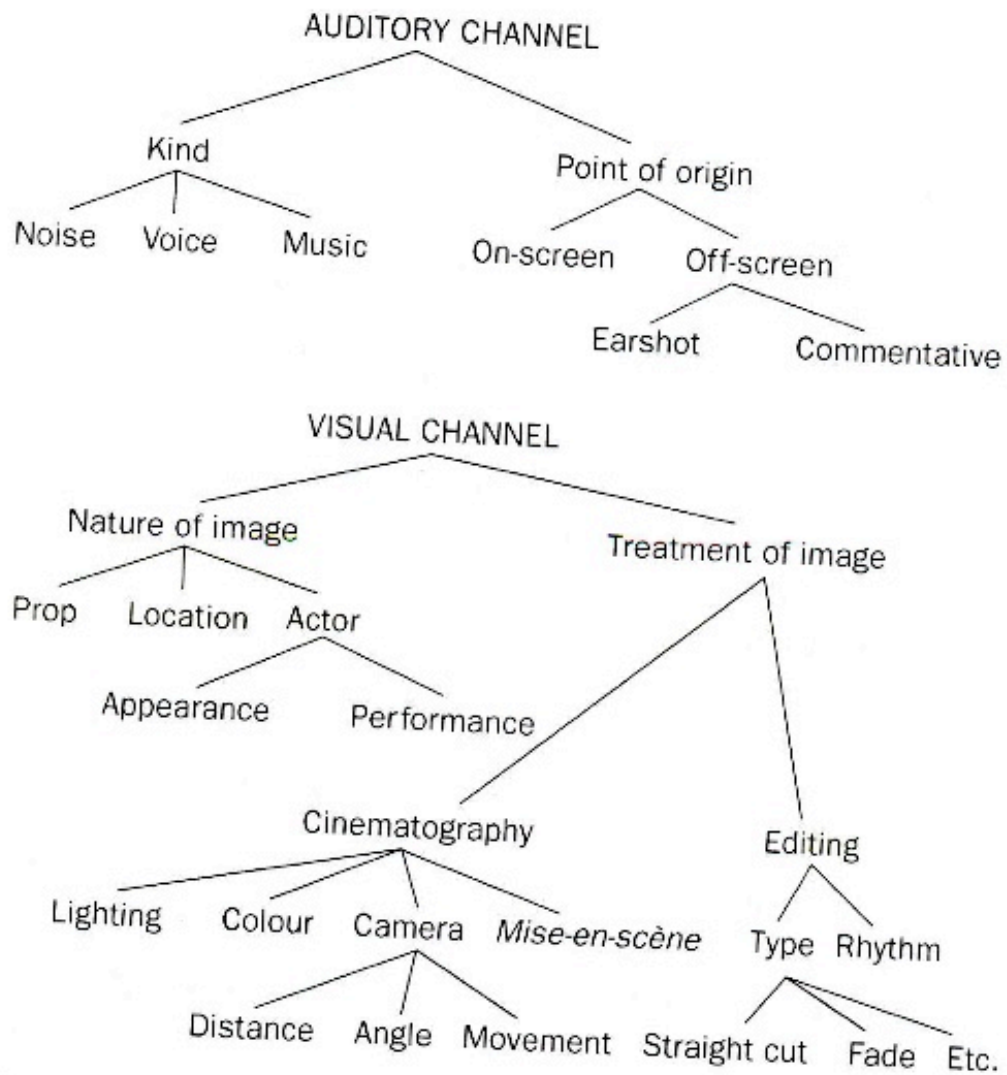
Film narration theory is difficult as it tends to be based on literary theory which is then adapted to fit the cinema screen. Lothe summarises two film narration theories, one from David Bordwell and the other from Seymour Chatman. Both theories take into account the spectator, but they differ in their focus on the viewer. Bordwell defines film narration as “the process whereby the film’s syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channelling

the spectator's construction of the *fabula*" (Lothe 2000: 29). Bordwell has been influenced by the Russian formalists, but adapted the terms *syuzhet* and *fabula* to fit more with his own theory. Lothe gives a summary of what Bordwell means with *fabula*, *syuzhet* and style.

For Bordwell, 'the *fabula* (sometimes translated as "story") ... embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field ... The *Syuzhet* (usually translated as "plot") is the actual arrangement and presentation of the *fabula* in the film. Crucial to Bordwell's theory is that the *syuzhet* of film as he sees it, only presents a small part of the total *fabula*, which is an implicit structure the viewer supports through assumptions and inferences. As the third component, style refers to the systematic use of cinematic devices. In contrast to *syuzhet*, which for Bordwell is a general characteristic of narrative, style is medium-specific (and, in film, thereby more technical) (2000: 29).

Chatman offers a different opinion: for him the spectator does not construct the film narrative but rather reconstructs the story. In this thesis Chatman's theory is the background for analysing film narration. Bordwell does not take the sender of the medium sufficiently into account. The audience is guided a little but they cannot construct the story themselves.

The role of the film narrator is intriguing. The film narrator has many similarities with the third-person narrator from literature. As Lothe says "Guiding the viewer's perception of the film, the film narrator is the film-maker's communicative instrument" (2000: 30) where it differs from the third person narration in literature is that the film narrator "... is a heterogeneous mechanical instrument, constituted by a large number of different components." (2000: 30). For the third person narrator in literature words are the instrument of influence over the reader. In film there are several more and Chatman provided a figure showing influences the cinematic narrator has on the audience.



There are two main categories for the narrator to influence the audience, audio and visual. The diagram shows us what kind of audio is possible and also if it is on-screen or off-screen. In other theory, on-screen sound is often referred to as diegetic sound, while off-screen is non-diegetic. The visual impact is divided between the original form of the image (nature of image) and how it is treated. The treatment of the image is subdivided into editing and cinematography. Comparing the narrator of literature to the narrator of the film, it becomes evident that the film narrator has many more ways to convey meaning simultaneously to audience. This effects dialogue in several ways. Obviously the impressions of a dialogue on screen compared with one printed on a page in a novel is different. There are more senses that

are being utilised in cinema and the pace is much quicker. You do not control the pace of the information yourself. In that sense one could argue that dialogue has to be shorter, otherwise scenes would take forever and there would be too much information for audience. Another point relating to dialogue where the narrator is involved is that any descriptive sentences could be removed as the camera will show it to the audience, instead of having it explained.

In relation to both *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* the film narrator is important. Ed Tom Bell works as a third person narrator in the novel, in the film Ed Tom Bell also has a narrative role, but not as distinct as in the novel. Although Bell's narrator role is hard to adapt from novel to screen, he is not omniscient and often left behind by the evolvment of the plot, what would be considered a spatial distance between narrator and events (Lothe 36). His narration is often about personal events and rarely accounts for the plot. At the end of the film, Ethan and Joel Coen use the voiceover of Bell, perhaps to affirm his role as the narrator. As Lothe points out: "Voice over is one of the many elements that constitute the film narrator: a voice outside the image" (Lothe: 30) ; what it does is that it shows the audience that he has had that role throughout the movie. Or to make it clear that the Coen brothers sympathies lie with Bell and his view of life and not the life of Chigurh.

In the film version of *The Road* the role of the third person and film narrator is more clearcut. The man's voiceover is the first thing the audience hears and its use continues throughout the film. Compared to Ed Tom Bell in *No Country for Old Men* the narrator in *The Road* is more reliable and up to date. The narration by the man is not spatially distanced, but temporally distanced. (Lothe 35). The man looks back on events which have happened to him and his family, but we keep coming back to the present throughout the narration. Voiceover also creates a distance between the narrator and the events. In relation to *The Road* this is something I will come back to later.

Film Auteur versus Author of Novel

Closely related to film narration and narrator is the debate about who the film author is in adaptations. The author of the novel is mostly a single person, however in cinema it is much more complex. Creating a movie is such a hard technical and expensive procedure that doing it on your own is impossible. Therefore there are many creative parts in making a movie “- the author of the screenplay, the producer, actors and actresses, photographers, etc.” (Lothe 31) . Nevertheless, the overall responsibility lies with the director so he or she is normally considered the author.

The main reason why the *director* is usually regarded as the film’s ‘author’ is that he or she not only has overall responsibility for according priorities and co-ordinating the activities that are part of the production process, but also functions creatively in relation to the screenplay and the thematics of the film. (Lothe 31).

Lothe is right in suggesting that the final responsibility will lie with the director, however, there are other parts to consider as well. For example, how strongly the director has been involved in developing the screenplay. As Linda Hutcheon points out in *A Theory of Adaptation* the responsibility lies with the director but :

...someone else usually writes the screenplay that begins the process; someone else first interprets the adapted text and paraphrases it for a new medium before the director takes on the task of giving this new text embodied life. (Hutcheon 2006:85).

The film authors in *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* are at least different. In *No Country for Old Men* the Coen brothers are both directors and writers of the screenplay, so they had close creative control over the movie compared to *The Road* where Joe Penhall wrote the screenplay and John Hillcoat was brought in later on to direct the movie. What effect this has on the two movies I will return to later on. In this thesis the definition of the

author of the film will be divided. In *No Country for Old Men* the authors will be regarded as the Coen brothers together with Cormac McCarthy. In *The Road* the author will not just be the director and the author of the novel, Joe Penhall will also be included as co-author of the film as he alone has written the screenplay.

Illustrating the difference between writing a novel, writing for the screen or writing an adaptation is important. In Wendell Aycock and Michael Schoenecke's *Film and Literature - a Comparative Approach to Adaptation* Horton Foote discusses the process of writing for the screen. The first obstacle is that one has to like the play, as he puts it "I don't have to always understand it, but I have to like it and be willing to try to understand it and go through the painful process of entering someone else's creative world." (Foote 1988:7). Foote illustrates how hard it is to take someone else's work and turn it into something different. For authors of novels the process of writing can be hard as well. Paul Auster comments in *A Companion to Literature and Film* that

When I first started, I thought it would come spontaneously, in a trance-like outpouring. So great was my need to write that I thought the story would be written by itself ... No sooner have I thought one thing than it evokes another thing, and then another thing, until there is an accumulation of detail so dense that I feel I am going to suffocate. (Gaudreault, Marion 2004:59).

For both authors it is a difficult undertaking. The author of a novel has created an image in his head about how the narrative, characters and plot work together. The adapter has to try to access and recreate this image in order to adapt it for the screen. As writers they know how hard such a process is as few want to rearrange what already is a finished work. Also, the relation to the audience changes drastically when adapting.

Audience Theory

In understanding dialogue, the audience plays a significant role. Especially within adaptations the role of the audience is intriguing as viewers are divided between having read or not read the novel. Hutcheon defines the audience regarding adaptations as “Unknowing” and “knowing”, those who are familiar with the adapted text and those who are not. She also points out different levels within the knowing audience which is fascinating with regard to both *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*.

Hutcheon suggests that a knowing audience will inevitably fill in gaps between the original and the adaptation. This is something that the adapters have to consider, as “...adapters rely on this ability to fill in the gaps when moving from the discursive expansion of telling to the performative time and space limitations of showing” (Hutcheon 121). However, there is a balance between relying on the audience to fill in the gaps and for the director to fill them in. Relying too much on the audience will create a movie with rather big gaps in the narrative and lacking references. In relation to *No Country for Old Men* the knowing audience is of great interest. Within the audience there will be those who know the novel by McCarthy, those who know previous work by the Coen brothers and those who know both. As Hutcheon points out “Differently knowing audiences bring different information to their interpretations of adaptations” (Hutcheon 125) Another important aspect to highlight about the knowing audience is how essential it is to know about genre and to have media literacy. “Genre and media ‘literacy’ as it is often called, can be crucial to the understanding of adaptations *as adaptations*.” (Hutcheon 126) To understand references and all aspects of the adaptation having an intimate knowledge of the genre and media in general is vital.

The same issue goes for *The Road*, but there is one difference I would like to point out. Two years prior to the release of the movie, *The Road* was selected for Oprah’s book club -

which promotes books to read and has a reputation of instantly creating best sellers out of the books promoted. Arguably *The Road* was his most famous book regardless, having won a Pulitzer Prize for it in 2007. Nevertheless, the effect on the adaptation is the important part. The knowing audience will have a greater knowledge of the novel rather than of the previous filmic work by John Hillcoat.

For adaptations the unknowing audience is just as important. As Hutcheon says “If we do not know that what we are experiencing actually is an adaptation or if we are not familiar with the particular work that it adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work” (Hutcheon 120) For the author of the film the unknowing audience might be even more relevant, they are the audience who come in with no prior knowledge about the narrative or history of the film. They regard the movie as any other film. This can be an advantage for as Hutcheon calls attention to “...all agree that even adaptations must stand on their own.” (Hutcheon 127).

For directors the balance between a knowing or an unknowing audience is crucial. Knowing audiences may often have a natural disinterest in the adaptation. Ella Shohat writes in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo *A Companion to Literature and Film* that the reason for such a contempt may be that “... some of the hostility to filmic adaptations of novels one wonders, be traceable in some subliminal and mediated way to this biblical injunction against the fetish of the image, the cult of star worship, and the fabrication of false gods?” (Shohat 2004: 24) Such a statement may be taking it a little too far. However, I agree that within the knowing audience there is a natural scepticism against the adaptors. There could be many reasons for this, but one of them is that the images created by the reader of the novel will be conjoined with the images from the adaptation forever. As Hutcheon mentions “What is intriguing is that, afterward, we often come to see the prior adapted work very differently as we compare it to the result of the adapter’s creative and interpretive act” (Hutcheon 121) For

this thesis the question of how audience expectations affect the dialogue is what is relevant and the discussion about how much this influences each adaptation will be dealt with more thoroughly in the following chapters.

Dialogue Theory

The focus in this thesis lies on dialogue in novels and adaptations so theory about how to solve dialogue is important to highlight. Sarah Kozloff has looked more closely at dialogue on screen. Kozloff disagrees with the idea that dialogue should be as little involved in cinema as possible, showing that throughout cinema history scholars and directors supported this notion. As John Ford once said, “When a motion picture is at its best, it is long on action and short on dialogue. When it tells its story and reveals its characters in a series of simple beautiful, active pictures, and does it with as little talk as possible, then the motion picture medium is being used to its fullest advantage” (Kozloff 2000:4) even up until 1998 the definition of dialogue in *Film Encyclopedia Third Edition* was:

dialogue: In a film, all spoken lines. Since the cinema is essentially a visual medium, dialogue is, or should be, used more sparingly than in the theatre, supplementing action rather than substituting it (Kozloff 8).

Kozloff goes against the notion that dialogue should be scarce and values the richness of dialogues instead. Kozloff suggests that there are four recurring themes in the criticism against dialogue: Words can lie, words are empty, words may be hasty and showing is superior to telling. These arguments are persuasive, but all of them could be questioned as well. Pictures can certainly lie, too, and in relation to speech-act theory words are actions themselves. Physical actions can be just as hasty as words and obvious mimics and acting are often not as subtle as they are credited to be (Kozloff 12). So there is no reason why dialogue

should be left out, it is more a question about transforming dialogue in the right way. A clever dialogue is not revealing but still leads the action onwards and develops characters.

Kozloff speaks of dialogue in film, but does not consider adaptations which is a problem for this thesis. However, her points about how dialogue functions within a genre are still original, lead to questions regarding why there is so little dialogue in both *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* and why it works so well. What arguably makes dialogue work in both movies is the close connection between genre and original novel. *No Country for Old Men* belongs to a movie genre that involves crime, drama, thriller and western. These genres are typically not rich in dialogue, especially not to forward the plot. However, dialogue within the western genre is fascinating. Dialogues in western might not be plentiful, but what is said is essential for both plot and characterisation. Jane Tomkins has written about ‘Western distrust language’ and “Time and again they set up situations whose message is that words are weak and misleading, only actions count; words are immaterial, only objects are real. But the next thing you know, someone is using language brilliantly” (Tomkins 1992:49). This is a typical situation for *No Country for Old Men*, in a movie where seemingly action is better than talking. Characters do not talk much, yet what they say is essential. For Josh Brolin the dialogue in *No Country for Old Men* presented challenges:

“I mean it was a fear, for sure, because dialogue that's what you kind of rest upon as an actor, you know? ... Drama and all the stuff is all dialogue motivated. You have to figure out different ways to convey ideas. You don't want to over-compensate because the fear is that you're going to be boring if nothing's going on. You start doing this and this and taking off your hat and putting it on again or some bullshit that doesn't need to be there. So yeah, I was a little afraid of that in the beginning (Murray, Rebecca).

For Brolin it becomes a question about in what other ways than through dialogue he can convey his meaning. However, what this comes down to is the fear that the audience might be bored if there is just silence on the screen and no action sequence. Yet what all characters end up doing is contextualising what little dialogue they have through acting, supplemented by mise-en-scene and audio from the Coen brothers.

In *The Road*, the genre is adventure, drama and thriller and therefore dialogue is different. In both novel and movie there is little dialogue, but the seriousness is intensified through silence.

Characterisation and Dialogue

I argue that dialogue is closely linked with characters, characterisation and eventually events. In literature there are several ways the events unfold to the reader. “In literary fiction events are shaped through a combination of narrative devices, plot and character components, and metaphorical patterns to which the reader is invited to respond as he or she works through the text” (Lothe 85). In film, character is also closely related to events. But whereas film can show external features more easily than literature Lothe comments that: “a film cannot convey a character’s thoughts, feelings, plans, and so forth in the way fictional literature can - partly because the film narrator’s functions are so unlike those of the literary narrator” (Lothe 86).

Therefore dialogue becomes important on screen as well as it does in literature. How is dialogue adapted from literature to the screen? If the directors have cut dialogue, how much of the character still remains? And how does dialogue convey equivalent meaning on screen as in literature when external features play a much larger part? This is what will be looked at in detail regarding *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*.

CHAPTER II: *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*

In *No Country for Old Men* (2005) we meet the old and experienced sheriff of a small town, Ed Tom Bell, who suddenly gets an unusual number of murders on his hands in Arizona. The novel has clear and distinct elements of a western. It starts in italics from what we later learn to be the sheriff saying that “I sent one boy to the gaschamber at Huntsville”(McCarthy 2007:3). We quickly get into the mindset of the sheriff and equally quickly we are involved with the plot of the novel. It deals with ruthless murderers and other people who are trying to do their job. It is a novel which deals with crime, but manages to broaden the genre into something more, something biblical, while still being contemporary.

The protagonist, Llewelyn Moss is out hunting, stumbles upon a drug deal where everybody has been killed. At the scene he discovers a large sum of money, which he takes. When the criminals responsible for the drug deal show up and notice that the money and drugs are missing they hire the antagonist Anton Chigurh in order to find the thief and get everything back. Quite early on it becomes evident that Moss, in spite of being a man of experience from the Vietnam War and not stupid, is in trouble when faced with Chigurh. As he himself says in a conversation with Carson Wells, “What is he suppose to be, the ultimate bad-ass?”(McCarthy 153). Chigurh is a hit-man who will not stop at anything in order to get the job done. He has no problem killing police officers, men who irritate him when he is at work and people who try to negotiate a deal. For instance when Carson Wells tries to settle the score between himself, Moss and Chigurh. Nevertheless, there is some philosophical consideration behind his ruthlessness when it comes to killing people, a matter I will come back to later on. The sheriff also quickly understands that he has something special on his hands and contemplates whether he is able to cope with the task that lies ahead of him. The novel evolves into a hunt between Chigurh and Llewelyn, where for quite some time Llewelyn manages to keep up, but in the end loses out to what is inevitable, his death. At the

same time we are following sheriff Bell, who acts as a first person narrator throughout the novel. Meanwhile he is struggling with his own feelings and ultimately defeat against Chigurh.

The Title

The title of the novel plays an important role in order to understand the characters we encounter. *No Country for Old Men* may allude to the feeling of not fitting in, this for instance could easily fit for Bell who struggles with the role of being an old sheriff and experiencing new times. Time is moving too fast and perhaps even so fast that he does not want to keep up with it anymore. He prefers riding a horse in order to investigate instead of taking the car. Also Bell seems to have given up his job. For instance he does not give Carla Jean the protection she needs, even though he knows the danger she is in.

Another aspect is the connection that it has with many of the characters having served in the Vietnam War and the notion that people had difficulty adapting to a normal life afterwards.

Chigurh is another character the title hints at. He is an abnormality, a person that seems to be impossible to get hold of. Chigurh does not fit in with society as he works according to principles few others can understand. He seemingly has a form of philosophical justification behind his principles. His ethics is something that bridges through his decisions as when he flips a coin at the petrol station to decide whether to kill the gas proprietor or not.

No Country for Old Men as a title is presumably taken from William Butler Yeats's poem "*Sailing to Byzantium*". The opening line of the poem goes, "THAT is no country for old men" (Yeats). Leo Braudy comments on the poem "the message is to leave the country and go to a place where the old are appreciated for their wisdom and their ability to create." However, Braudy points out that McCarthy (and indeed the Coen brothers) have changed the

title so that it means a basic disgust for human behaviour and; “The only answer is to retreat into private pleasures, which are at best fleeting and frequently just veil more pain” (Braudy, Leo 2010:10). Braudy then suggests that the title is more fitting for the sheriff and Chigurh, who eventually are the only two who retreat into their private pleasures and get away with it. Chigurh, by not getting caught, Bell for leaving his profession.

Just as *No Country for Old Men* covers more than one genre, the title carries more than one meaning, which may vary in accordance with the characters. It also creates an expectation for the audience and therefore affects the way we look at dialogue in both novel and movie.

Auteur, Genre and Audience

The auteur and his/her role, what the genre is and who the audience is are questions that need to be addressed whether it is literature or cinema. In relation to dialogue this is something very important as well. Especially how genre and auteur affect dialogue plays on the expectations of the audience.

When reading a novel, there automatically follows a creation of images in the head of the narrative, the characters and the structure. Similarly the auteur creates images when writing a work. The auteur is the creator and when creating one cannot help, but to make images out of the narrative. When it comes to literature the auteur of the novel is singular, but the reader can create several auteurs. Imagination automatically establishes a perspective as to who tells the story. We are aware that there is a creator of the novel, but what is then the role of the narrator? Is the narrator just a creation of the auteur or is the narrator actually the voice of the auteur, guiding us through the novel? In *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction* Jakob Lothe has written about the role of the auteur within literature and cinema and how this role can be complicated. Who the reader perceives, as auteur and narrator is important when

assessing dialogue in a novel. The roles of the characters and who the narrator is have to be defined in order for the reader to fully comprehend and understand the dialogue. In literature such a role is often defined through the character we perceive as the protagonist or through the narrator. The reader gets sympathy for certain characters through the choice of the auteur and is therefore viewing the dialogue in a subjective perspective. In *No Country for Old Men* such a narrator and protagonist exists in both Bell and Moss, with Bell being a first person narrator and Moss the protagonist who attempts to defeat the antagonist Chigurh.

In the cinematic version the role of narrators and auteur alters. The movie and screenplay are an adaptation from the original novel. Both Joel and Ethan Coen have directed and written the screenplay, suggesting they are the auteurs. Nevertheless this is not to say they are the ones who always control the camera. As discussed earlier the role of the cameramen does not always represent the narrator and it also does not always represent the auteur. The role that Bell has in the novel as a first person narrator is changed in the movie, leaving the audience to wonder, who to have most sympathy with during conversations and dialogues. How is the audience to interpret the characters when all the different auteurs have had their say in the creation of characters? In terms of mise-en-scene there are several ways the audience can identify with the protagonist and be bewildered about who is supposed to be the protagonist. Also, the narration of the character we follow at any given moment and the actions of the different characters help us to understand who the protagonist is. During dialogues between Chigurh and Moss, the audience will sympathize with Moss and make him the protagonist. The only dialogue between Moss and Wells questions who is the protagonist and with which character to sympathize. It is more difficult to decide whether Moss or Wells is the hero. Is the audience with Wells who tried to tell Moss he is in trouble or Moss who is the one struggling? A similar point can be made about conversations between Carla Jean and Moss. Are viewers feeling sympathy for Carla Jean, a wife who had nothing to do with the

actual process of getting into trouble or Moss, who in many ways is pictured as a hero through his actions.

The audience is also drawn in by the auteur. When reading a novel certain parts of the audience do it because of the auteur, for instance, by previously having read a work by McCarthy and liking this auteur. There is however, a difference between McCarthy's audience and the audience of the Coen brothers. The Coen brothers are mostly known for their satirical and comedic movies, (although sometimes dark comedy) these are not adjectives that go hand in hand with McCarthy's name. With audience expectations being different, the ways in which the audience interprets dialogue is bound to change. If an audience member is expecting satirical and comical traces in dialogues in *No Country for Old Men* the perception will vary. In his review Braudy comments on the reaction to one of his friends. "I shouldn't say "baddies" in such a jokey way, though, since *No Country for Old Men* is hardly going for the obvious pratfalls, although one friend of mine reported that he laughed all the way through, much to the upset of the people sitting nearby" (Braudy :10). So seemingly some audience members went in with the expectation of a classic Coen brothers movie, but there can be no doubt that the experience would have been different from the person sitting next to you in the cinema. It is possible for an audience member to view a movie without having read the novel or having any knowledge about Cormac McCarthy. However, the audience should remember who the original auteur is.

Genre is also something that affects the dialogue. The audience should not expect the same type of dialogue in drama compared to comedy. This is closely related to audience expectations towards the auteur in terms of knowing what the auteur normally produces. Certainly there may be changes in what an auteur produces and perhaps even more in cinema than in literature. One could argue that the cinema audience might be more open minded, but nevertheless it will still have an impact on how to perceive dialogue. Sarah Kozloff has

written about dialogue in movies and relates it to the different ways dialogue works in accordance with the genre. In a movie and novel like *No Country for Old Men*, where genres are mixed, the audience is tested with their ability to understand the different roles of the characters and through that being able to follow the dialogue in relation to the genre.

Although normally this would not be considered much of a problem, the problem arises when we see how little dialogue there is in *No Country for Old Men*. How are we able to understand the characters and therefore the narrative through so little dialogue?

Dialogue in *No Country for Old Men*

Throughout the novel dialogue is scarce, but this does not mean there is a constant inner dialogue. Every other chapter is written in italics and conveys the thoughts of Ed Tom Bell, as first person narrator, his view on the life he has lived in the past, the situation in the present and what he should do in the future. When there is dialogue, the meaning of dialogue is not elaborated on, it is a case of saying it all without actually saying too much. The dialogue works in order to fill in the blanks the action leaves out or bring the action onwards.

Dialogue is, as stated previously, closely connected with genre. Although the dialogue in *No Country for Old Men* makes perfect sense and does not disadvantage the plot, genre expectations make dialogue easier to analyse. In Sarah Kozloff's book *Overhearing Film Dialogue* she argues that dialogue is better the longer it is and comments on how this is different from the normal perspective in cinema where dialogue is supposed to be short on length and long on meaning. (insert quotes from introduction chapter)

Overhearing Film Dialogue is interesting, as it takes a different approach to what makes a good dialogue in movies. Certainly she is correct if we look at celebrated movies such as *Pulp Fiction* by Quentin Tarratino. Dialogue is far from short, rather long, winding

and with logic behind the conversation that is intrigued¹. In *Kill Bill* this changes because Tarrantino is able to embrace different genres and explore the universes of Japanese and western influenced movies. (Tarrantino, Quentin 2006). Dialogue is something that evolves with the audience, their ability to understand the cinema experience and take in the information. With new technological achievements the audience is astonished by the effects and pay attention to them. However, when these effects become standard, other parts of the cinematic experience play a role in how we look at the screen and therefore dialogue becomes important. Excitement about something never seen before will leave the audience mesmerised for a short while before they get used to the way it works. Once the audience is able to take in more of the effects, dialogue can become more intricate and for the audience easier to follow. To a certain extent this can be said about *Matrix*, which at the release of the first movie (1999) impressed audiences around the world with breath-taking effects and action scenes. The shock of seeing such effects were lost in the second and third part of the movie, and the audience began to turn their attention towards the narrative. Several reviewers² pointed out that the plot and dialogue did not contain much depth behind all the sci-fi philosophy and Steve Murray sums it up with his review of *The Matrix Revolutions*:

“Faithful fans of the original “Matrix” have held their breath for five months to see if the Wachowski brothers could untangle the narrative knots and leaden dialogue of “The Matrix Reloaded,” finishing the trilogy with something as smart, sharp and exciting as the first flick. Well, those fans are likely to be breathing sighs of disappointment, not satisfaction” (Murray 2011).

¹ For example in *Pulp Fiction* the dialogue between Vincent, Jules, Brett and Roger is a dialogue which moves fast and has several participants between them without the audience knowing what they are talking about. Regardless of this, the audience is able to follow the conversation, understand that it is a question of money while learning about the difference in the characters of Vincent and Jules. For complete dialogue, see screenplay for *Pulp Fiction*.

² A quick look at the Top Critics reviews at Rotten Tomatoes.com underlines this point.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/matrix_revolutions/reviews/?type=top_critics
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/matrix_reloaded/reviews/?type=top_critics

The same can be said about newly released 3D movies. *Avatar*, which was the first major 3D movie, did not have a completely new plot or incredible story even though it is the biggest box office success and the world's most expensive movie ever. The story has in many ways a classic plot, but it was massively helped by special effects. Andrew Pulver from The Guardian agreed that the movie was beautiful to look at but commented: "But what is this highest-of-high-en image-making aimed at? Cameron has constructed a fable that combines militaristic sci-fi, alarmingly vacuous eco-waffle and an intra-species love story that is presumably designed to cover all the bases" (Pulver, Andrew 2009). Pulver suggests that *Avatar*, while revolutionary pretty to look at, does not have a ground-breaking plot or narrative. The love and ecological story is similar to the plot of *Pocahontas*. While militaristic sci-fi is something *Star Wars* or *Planet of the Apes* did several years ago.

Where Kozloff is wrong, is when she claims that good dialogue is always elaborate, extensive and may be applied to any genre. There are certainly times it works, but depending on the mise-en-scene and the genre of the specific movie the dialogue adapts accordingly. Another point of interest is that almost 50 % of all movies being produced today are based on literary texts. Kozloff fails to mention how dialogue is different in adaptations compared to movies that are not. Originally not adapted for the screen, dialogue in adaptations is different.

In *No Country for Old Men* this is the case. Dialogues have been adapted and reconstructed in order to fit the cinematography and mise-en-scene of the screen better. The setting of a warm summer in the southern United States close to the Mexican border and laid back characters. Regardless, they are all men of great action when needed and called upon. Agreeing that action speaks for itself and rarely needs any dialogue to accompany it,³ setting, characters and dialogue turn *No Country for Old Men* into a western with elements of crime and drama. In literature such a change of tempo within the narrative is not a problem. The

³ Regardless of audience cinematic evolution, dialogue within action often leads to audience losing focus and intensity of the movie as there often is too much to pay attention to.

reader can expect a change of pace in books and if the plot has suddenly gone too fast, the reader has the option of turning back one page to look over it again. Sudden action, descriptions from a narrator followed by dialogue is not uncommon. When sitting at the cinema, the audience does not have that option, the audience is led and has to follow. As with narrative so it is with dialogue in literature, it can have short sentences, quick responses or long dialogues with extensive rhetoric and logic. Changing the way certain characters speak is not a problem, each one can talk in their characteristic way, but may also talk in different ways within the same novel. One of the reasons is that in literature you do not have a picture to judge the character on. The audience will probably have a description, but acting and mimics are not something one can find in a novel. A character is something the reader creates in order to see the narrative and characterisation. By doing so the reader may adapt a character more easily and personalise it. When actors interpret a role the reader/audience might struggle if a sudden change in acting occurs. The build up of a character is therefore different in cinema compared to the build up in literature and so dialogue has to be adapted for the screen and a different audience interaction.

This may be one of the reasons for shortening some of the dialogues between Anton Chigurh and his victims regarding the reasons why he kills or intends to kill. The acting out of Chigurh in the adaptation and the visual outlook limits dialogue in a way that makes more sense according to the performance of Chigurh in the movie. If Chigurh was to give sudden explanations why he is acting the way he is, or start offering justifications to the victims (and therefore the audience) the character might seem to have sides to him that do not seem reasonable by comparison to the acting and his appearance. When Chigurh is about to kill Carla Jean, extensive elaboration would seem strange to the audience. Is Chigurh suddenly a character showing compassion and care for his victims after everything else that has happened? Including such a discussion in the end would have conflicted with the message of

the figure. Either all such elaborations had to be included or none of them, just including one or two would have made Chigurh less believable.

Anton Chigurh

Chigurh is the character that through dialogue in the novel allows the reader an insight into other characters, his personality and actions. Dialogues Chigurh has with other characters do not only give insight into his character, these dialogues also give the reader insight into the other characters. Chigurh is a character that drives a conversation forward without saying too much. He makes other characters uneasy with his presence even if he does not say anything threatening. When he elaborates it is often with regard to a higher principle and values that are not comprehensible to others in the narrative. The combination of saying little but saying it all is one of the things that establish him as a dangerous and essential character for understanding both novel and movie. Chigurh's actions are ruthless, but his words explain and justify them. Not only to the victims of Chigurh, but also to the reader. What now follows is a closer look at certain elements of dialogue that are important to the character of Chigurh and also the narrative of the novel: How words are used to forward, put the plot into a new perspective and inevitably how Ethan and Joel Coen have fitted the dialogues to the screen.

Chigurh does not like events to be controlled by others, he himself wants to be in control of what is going to happen. To a certain extent he believes that faith and destiny are around, but as he explains to Wells, he thinks he can change the events and what seems to be inevitable. When taken in by the local sheriff, Chigurh explains his reasons for doing so. "I'm not sure why I did this but I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe that one can. That such a thing is possible. But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do" (McCarthy 175). He started to question his belief and being an outsider of society. What we also learn from this is how and why the seemingly invincible Chigurh has

been taken in by the police. This may be why he does not accept the offer from Wells. The personality of Chigurh also comes across as very confident about how the events will turn out in the future. When Wells tries to offer him the satchel of money because he knows where it is, Chigurh simply replies that he knows where it is and where it will be. "It will be brought to me and placed at my feet" (McCarthy 176). This shows Chigurh not only as a confident character, but almost as a godlike figure, the focus on "placed at my feet" cannot be underestimated and it brings forward connotations of worship.

Chigurh seems to hold in contempt people who value money more than actual life, he does not appreciate characters who enter a profession simply for the money instead of the value of the profession. He dislikes the owner of the gas station as he married into the place and is now making a living out of it without really having to have worked for it in his life. He does not like Wells as his approach to the job as a hit-man often seems to be about the money. The offer by Wells of going to an ATM and giving Chigurh money is turned down by "It's just in the wrong currency" (McCarthy 173). As he says in dialogue with Wells, Chigurh himself used to be like that, but getting shot changed him and when Moss and Chigurh have a telephone conversation together he explains that "We had a difference in opinion" (McCarthy 173). Interesting enough, when it comes to Moss, he seems to respect him in a way. When Chigurh has a conversation with Moss about the situation they are in, Chigurh seems disappointed, but when Moss replies to Chigurh's account of how this is going to end he shows a different side. "I'm goin to bring you somethin all right, Moss said. I've decided to make you a special project of mine. You aint goin to have to look for me at all"(McCarthy 185). It shows Chigurh that Moss has a similar character. Granted Chigurh knows that Moss is out of his depth, but at least he is a person that goes forward and wants to settle this in his way. As Chigurh replies "I'm glad to hear that. You were beginning to disappoint me" (McCarthy 185).

The character of Chigurh changes throughout the narrative of the novel, from the start he seems like a dangerous hit-man. A rent-a-kill who is extremely good at what he does. As for instance Moss mentions, when he talks with Wells “What is he supposed to be, the ultimate bad-ass?” (McCarthy 153). However, the reader learns throughout the narrative that the world is not just black and white for Chigurh, the reasoning behind his doing becomes clearer and in the end we can somehow understand the madness that he has within him. The first signs of this are in the dialogue Chigurh has with the gas proprietor. Chigurh obviously being careful about what other people notice about him gets annoyed about the employee behind the counter. The reader notices that Chigurh finds something wrong and when the proprietor asks whether something is wrong with anything Chigurh replies “Is that what you’re asking me? Is there something wrong with anything?” (McCarthy 53). Chigurh is making the man uneasy even though using very little dialogue and conveying to the reader that something is going to happen. The situation continues to become more and more tense until the scene accumulates with Chigurh offering the coin toss which the proprietor has to call without knowing what he is playing for. For Chigurh the reasoning behind the coin is obvious, as a reply to the man’s remark about not putting anything up for the bet he replies. “Yes you did. You’ve been putting it up your whole life. You just didn’t know it” (McCarthy 56). Chigurh is referring to the point that this is a coin toss about his life, a coin toss that will decide if this man will live or not. His whole life and everything he has done up until now is what is being played for. After the coin toss goes well Chigurh offers insight into the importance of the coin and the logic behind it.

“Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh said. Small things. Things you wouldnt even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People dont pay attention. And then one day there’s an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. Well, you say. It’s just a coin. For instance. Nothing special there. What could that be an

instrument of? You see the problem. To separate the act from the thing. As if the parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it's just a coin. Yes. That's true. Is it?" (McCarthy 57).

Chigurh's ethics and morals follow very naturalistic ways, yet in other ways he does not. Chigurh believes every action has a reaction. To Carla Jean he explains "Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this. The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn. No line can be erased" (McCarthy 259). Even though a person tries they cannot change what will happen. In moral naturalism the world consists of propositions, some which are true others that are not. Such propositions are made true by objective features of the world, independent of human opinion. Therefore Chigurh's view of how events occur is similar to moral naturalism. He believes that actions happen for a reason and a consequence will follow because of it. A person may do whatever he or she want to do and believe the act to be an innocent one, however in the end there is always an accounting. Yet Chigurh also distances himself from others, suggesting that he himself is not a part of these naturalistic rules that everybody else should obey. Early in the dialogue he mentions to the gas proprietor that "I guess that passes for manners in your cracker view of things" (McCarthy 52). Cracker meant as "a poor, usually Southern white man"(Merriam-Webster.com). Showing that he is looking down on him and assuming that he belongs to the white people from Southern United States. One can also notice how McCarthy has used spelling to convey a difference in opinion between Chigurh and the gas proprietor. When the proprietor goes "Well I need to see about closin." (McCarthy 52). Chigurh replies "see about closing"(McCarthy 53). Chigurh uses the correct spelling and does not have the dialect of the proprietor. This could be used by McCarthy to illustrate what kind of man the proprietor is, but it also separates Chigurh from the others and shows him as

someone better. He does the same with Wells before he kills him, giving insight into the difference between himself and Wells even though they are in the same line of work “You think I’m like you. That it’s just greed. But I’m not like you. I live a simple life” (McCarthy 177). Chigurh is not driven by financial rewards of his job, he is driven by something different. Chigurh does not regard himself above death, he knows that it eventually will come, but as he explains to Wells. “It does not mean to me what it does to you” (McCarthy 177). He disagrees with what death will bring and the consequences of it. His views on death, the reader can only speculate on, but he does not fear it at least.

The role of his character gives an unique insight into the narrative of the novel, a deeper understanding of other characters and how they function within the story. Chigurh is the character that leads the reader onwards and conveys the meaning behind the novel. How does the character of Chigurh work in relation with the other characters and does dialogue make the audience understand the role of Chigurh in the movie *No Country for Old Men*?

One of the first things to notice in the movie is the length of Chigurh’s dialogues: they are shorter than in the novel. For instance the final remarks from Chigurh at the gas station are left out. The remarks have been substituted with the three words “Which it is” (Coen, Ethan. Coen, Joel. 2007 time 24:06). In the novel the last comments from Chigurh give a first insight into the mentality and principles that Chigurh has about life and the type of work he does. The consequence of replacing the line with “Which it is” is to summarize the last sentence that Chigurh makes and to confuse the audience. The effect the Coen brothers have maintained is Chigurh as an enigma. A character that we do not really understand. Before this dialogue the audience knows Chigurh as a dangerous killer who has just murdered a police officer. Shortening the dialogues leaves the audience with the impression of a ruthless killer, who is hard to comprehend.

There are other factors which also work with the audience, how they understand Chigurh as a character and we perceive the dialogue. In the novel we are given an impression of Chigurh who is cautious and threatening towards the gas proprietor. For instance we are told that he has never taken his eyes off the proprietor. The focus is mostly on the eating of cashew nuts. Adapting such a scene to the screen gives directors some difficulty as the camera will be focused on the faces of the characters in the dialogue and the audience is bound to read the expressions that come from it. When the novel gives little descriptive detail about the characters directors are left with the difficult situation of adapting a scene, where the dialogue originally was in focus. In the adaptation the result is powerful, yet somehow changed. The acting of Javier Bardem makes Chigurh look menacing and the dialogue also starts out in that way, yet there is an element of comedy in this particular dialogue. For instance the smile Chigurh gives when replying to the proprietor's question if something is wrong with anything. Also the way that the pitch and tone of Chigurh's voice varies: at one point he even mimics the slightly hill-billy character at the gas station. In the novel there are traces of it, for example the way he repeats sentences from the proprietor. However, the repeating is then written with proper spelling, suggesting that he is correcting more than he is mimicking him. Dark humour is not uncommon in the Coen brothers' film so audiences that have seen Coen movies before might perceive it more as a comedic dialogue.

Another effect that has been added in the adaptation is the choking on cashew nuts when Chigurh learns that the proprietor has married into the gas station. Another point in the dialogue shows how Chigurh is surprised or taken aback by something. It is interesting in what it tells us about Chigurh as a character. One could argue that Chigurh has a problem with people who are not in control of their own destiny or go through life without taking action by themselves. The words by the proprietor may spark such an emotion with Chigurh and therefore make him even more upset with the proprietor. Chigurh's final remarks in the

dialogue of the novel is an insight into this view that he has and so this simple acting may be a reference to it in the adaptation as the line is replaced in the movie. The choking is a sign of what is to come so the effect of “Which it is” is intensified and therefore leaves the audience with a feeling that these words mean something more than they actually do.

It may also be possible to look at the cough and “Which it is” as something comedic. From the first question from the proprietor Chigurh seems annoyed. Chigurh’s reply to the second question shows us that he has taken offence “And what business is it of yours where I’m from, *friendo*?” (McCarthy 52). Now Chigurh has the confirmation to his first opinion of the man. That nuts are getting stuck in his throat can almost be seen as Chigurh realising that this is too good to be true, almost as if he has just realised what an opportunity he has come across. The repetition of “You married into it” also works as a confirmation of his first impression. The line “Which it is” is comedic in a sense that Chigurh suddenly disarms the whole situation. It is almost as if he is saying “What were you worried about? I was only joking with you.”

Equally important to remember is that the actor has quite some influence on how a scene is played out. The screenplay neither mentions Chigurh’s tone of the voice nor the cough. Reading the scene in the screenplay much of the same feeling from the book is kept, the difference really being the replacement of the final line. It is important to remember that after several attempts and approaches, alternations of the screenplay can occur accidentally. During the editing process the final scene is actually put together. Normally, different takes will compose the final scene that is put up on the screen. The actors’ and directors’ different approaches to the scene may be put together in the end to give a new impression to the audience.

Chigurh as a character in the movie has generally less moral and principle behind him. Compared to the novel, he rarely gives any principle reason for his actions through

dialogue and is just a hit-man. The Coen brothers have also left out Chigurh's reasoning for being taken in by the sheriff. A dialogue between Wells and Chigurh, shifts the focus on the money that Wells tries to offer Chigurh. Surprisingly he still comes across as a more likeable and wiser person than Ed Tom Bell, Moss, Carla Jean or Wells. What defines Chigurh as a character is his principles and morals - so how do the Coen brothers manage to maintain them when justification through dialogue is no longer there?

The solution from the Coen brothers is to use the acting of Bardem and compose shots so the audience gets the message, leaving much of the dialogue out. For sentences of importance close ups of the character saying it is used. In the conversation between the gas proprietor and Chigurh medium long shots are used most of the time, but when words are stressed, close ups are used. For example when Chigurh goes "You do not know what you are talking about, do you?" (Coen: time: 21:24). What long justification Chigurh uses in the novel has been stripped for the movie and what is left behind is a hit-man who works for a man to solve a problem that he has. The principles and thoughts of Chigurh are cut down to a minimum, if included at all. The audience is then left with a more open view of what to think and feel about Chigurh.

Dialogue Between Chigurh and Carla Jean

One dialogue shows an interesting counterpoint to the views Chigurh normally expresses and that is the dialogue with Carla Jean. Similarities are found in the dialogue Chigurh has with the gas proprietor or with Wells about his naturalistic logic of events in life. The difference is that Chigurh shows a more affectionate characteristic than he did with the proprietor or Wells. At some points Chigurh genuinely seems to regret the events leading to Carla Jean's murder.

From the dialogue between Chigurh and Moss we have learnt that Chigurh seems reluctant to kill Carla Jean, but will do it if he has to, in order to get the job done. Seeing as

Moss did not give himself up, Chigurh has to finish what he has promised to do. In the novel Chigurh explains his reasons for killing Carla Jean to her: “Yes. We’re at the mercy of the dead here. In this case your husband” (McCarthy 255) - he gave her husband his word. When Carla Jean points out that it makes no sense since Moss is dead he replies, “Yes. But my word is not dead. Nothing can change that” (McCarthy 255). Carla Jean understands that Chigurh aims to kill her and is trying to understand the events leading to it. She explains to Chigurh that “I’ve suffered a loss of everything I ever had. My husband wanted to kill me?” (McCarthy 256). Chigurh, upon hearing this, asks her “Is there anything you would like to say?” (McCarthy 256). Instead of killing her there and then he opens for dialogue. He tries to comfort her, saying “You’ll be all right. Try not to worry about it.” (McCarthy 257). This comforting from Chigurh is something that seemingly follows both Wells and Moss who are accountable for the actions of someone else. A similar type of dialogue takes place between Wells and Chigurh, when he tries to make Wells come to terms with his situation. The difference between that dialogue and this one is that here Chigurh gives the other participant of the dialogue a chance, he suggests a coin toss.

The offering of the coin toss is significant and gives insight into the character of Chigurh. Chigurh’s explanation about the coin toss and the justice in the world that lies behind is worth analysing. When Carla Jean suggests that Chigurh would not have let her go regardless of the outcome of the coin toss Chigurh replies:

“I had no say in the matter. Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this. The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn. No line can be erased. I had no belief in your ability to move a coin to your bidding. How could you? A person’s path through the world seldom changes and even more seldom will it change abruptly. And the shape of your path was visible from the beginning” (McCarthy 259).

Through dialogue the view on how to live your life according to Chigurh becomes clear for the reader. He follows the rule of nature and nature alone. He believes that nothing can be changed and nothing will be forgotten. What he thought to be possible earlier in the dialogue he had with Wells is therefore gone. The principles Chigurh has over life suggest that there is a path for everybody, which will be followed and one can do little to alter that path. The reason for offering Carla Jean a coin toss is a previous comment in the dialogue, he explains it like this “Yet even though I could have told you how all of this would end I thought it not too much to ask that you have a final glimpse of hope in the world to life your heart before the shroud drops, the darkness. Do you see?” (McCarthy 259). He has learnt earlier that she has lost faith so he offers her hope. In terms of character, this is probably how affectionate and caring Chigurh can be. He says he knows the outcome, he knows he will kill her, but he does not want her to die without any hope.

Contrasting the dialogue between novel and adaptation there are many differences. Most striking is how short the dialogue is in the movie. It spans a few sentences and what Chigurh alludes to about the way the world functions is left out in the movie. The dialogue on screen focuses on the fact that Chigurh has promised Moss to kill Carla Jean. The coin toss, Chigurh’s principle and reasons are substituted with two sentences from Chigurh. In response to Carla Jean saying that Moss did not give her up like he says “I don’t say anything. Except it was foreseen” (Ethan, Coen, Joel Coen. 2006:117). And after Carla Jean calls him crazy and that she knew what was in store for her the moment she saw him. “Yes. Things fall into place” (Coen, 117). These two sentences are a summary of the dialogue between the Carla Jean and Chigurh. One can see how they sum up the rules of life that Chigurh has. Carla Jean admits it was foreseen to end this way, “I knowed exactly what was in store for me” (Coen 117). For Chigurh, things fall into place and then he kills her.

Analysis of Chigurh

There are two ways to assess Chigurh based on the dialogues. First, he shows himself as a more human character, a character that we at least may attempt to understand. Second, even though one gets a greater insight into the reasons behind the character, the outcome is still a hit-man with little empathy. A classic western villain who enjoys destruction and death. He tries and give Carla Jean hope, but still knows that he will kill her. It is what Scott Covell would describe as classic western villain.

The western villain killer experiences life vis-a-vis violence. Whatever the tool for perpetrating it, and whatever his attitude and era, his *weltanschauung* is confirmed by his propensity for /joy in /intractable bent for destruction: a destruction that empowers and deifies him. In Addition, his appearance is striking often eccentric, sometimes horrible. A crack shot and death with any weapon (however strange it may be), the Western villain killer's greatest joy is to toy with his victims (Covell 2009: 98).

Chigurh certainly fits the description of the classic Western villain. He is brutal and arguably he seems to toy with Carla Jean, offering the coin toss for hope, but still knowing he will kill her. At the same time the coin toss is not always a way of toying. Earlier, with the gas proprietor, we see the the rule of the coin which Chigurh then follows. Perhaps then Chigurh regards himself more as a god character. As he himself says "...I am in charge of who is coming and who is going" (McCarthy 251).

Despite less dialogue in the movie, the outcome and action of the character are still the same. What is then the effect an audience gets with less dialogue from Chigurh? It leaves the audience with less distinction and more bewildered as to Chigurh's character and this might be the reason for some of the mixed emotional records that Foley mentions in his review of the movie.

How successful this movie by the Coen brothers was is up for debate. The movie did very well in terms of viewing figures, was well received by critics and won an Oscar for Best Motion Picture. In total *No Country for Old Men* grossed 171 million dollars (Boxoffice Mojo.com). So in terms of income and rewards the movie was a success. However, how much of the original character of Chigurh comes across is something that is more uncertain.

For audience members who had read the book and perhaps seen the movie several times a clear, distinct purpose and meaning to Chigurh may come across. However, the majority of the audience do not watch a movie several times or pay close attention to details. Few would consider Chigurh as a likeable character or one they could feel sympathy for and in the end he is reduced to an antagonist from a western movie. A good comparison would be Lee Van Cleef in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. Indeed, as Andrew Sarris mentions: “When the Coen Brothers appeared on the stage of Frederic P. Rose Hall in the Time Warner Center with the members of their cast, they introduced Mr. Bardem as their own Lee Van Cleef, a generally villainous character actor in the Sergio Leone Western cycle” (Sarris 2007). The hit-man who is after money will not stop at anything to get what the job pays, has sociopathic elements and does not show any emotions. Chigurh is still separated from this classic western figure as he is able to walk out alive in the end, while the protagonist does not. It leaves the audience with doubts regarding the role of the character. If the audience follows the classic western or action movie, the last person standing should be the hero, which neither Bell or Chigurh seems to be. Perhaps the Coen brothers have attempted to create a more distinct and clearer Chigurh in order to not mislead the audience. Yet there is an open ending, making the movie a modern western. This forces the audience to think more about premise, plot and different characters of the movie all together. By removing central elements of

Chigurh's dialogue, the Coen brothers have not isolated the character from the others, Chigurh has become more interactive with them.

Llewelyn Moss

In *No Country for Old Men* Llewelyn Moss is the character that comes closest to resemble a protagonist. He is the hero the reader and the audience wants to succeed. If Chigurh is a man of few words Moss is even better at it. He speaks little and has been a character of action throughout his life. Through dialogue we get an impression of Moss: he is a person who firmly believes in his abilities to finish what he has started. He knows about the danger of his moves, but he tries to stay calm, collected and well prepared. Incidentally when he decides to go out to the scene of the crime again he packs ammunition and a gun in order to make sure he will have something to defend himself. However he is a character that gives little insight through dialogue, it is through action he shows who he is.

Llewelyn Moss and Carla Jean

One of the more affectionate dialogues in the novel is between Moss and Carla Jean when he calls her up from Mexico. Usually they speak in a rather unemphatic tone and a jargon typical for southern America and Texas/Arizona. Moss has just come back from the desert and Carla Jean is upset that he has been away for a whole day. But Moss is not very interested in her or an argument. They have small arguments throughout the dialogue.

Can I have the keys? she said.

Where you goin.

Get some cigarettes.

cigarettes.

Yes, Llewelyn. Cigarettes. I been setting here all day.

What about cyanide? How are we fixed for that?

Just let me have the keys. I'll set out in the damn yard and smoke (McCarthy: 21).

Small arguments like this seem normal in their relationship. Neither Carla Jean nor Moss makes a big deal out of the arguments. They do not seem to take offence by the words they say to each other, it seems more like a game, even though there is affection between them: they just have their own way of showing it.

Where have you been all day?

Went to get you some cigarettes.

I dont even want to know. I dont even want to know what all you been up to.

He sipped the beer and nodded. That'll work, he said.

I think it's better just to not even know even.

You keep runnin that mouth and I'm goin to take you back there and screw you.

Big talk.

Just keep it up.

That's what she said.

Just let me finish this beer. We'll see what she said and what she didnt say

(McCarthy).

What the reader can take as typical affectionate arguing is "Big talk.", "Just keep it up." and "That's what she said." They are not romantic words, but they are not meant to be hurtful either. They are a part of the game they play between them. Moss later gets up and plans to go

out to the crime scene again while Carla Jean is annoyed, but at the same time she shows affection towards Moss because she assumes he is in trouble. Or as he puts it “I’m fixing to go do somethin dumbern hell but I’m goin anyways” (McCarthy 24). Moss knows, what he is supposed to do is stupid, but he still feels it is the right choice. Does he think he can get information about what has happened or is it simply because he wants to help the last surviving victim?

Carla Jean and Moss stay loosely in touch with each other every now and again, small talk to make sure they are fine, but without talking too much. An interesting dialogue occurs after a few days have passed. Moss has to convince Carla Jean’s mother in order to get her on the phone. Carla Jean’s first sentence is not a welcoming one “I didnt think you’d do me thisaway” (McCarthy 180). We understand that Carla Jean is not sure what to do and afraid of what might be happening. However, the harsh tone she has at the start of the conversation quickly goes away. She is more concerned about what is going on with Moss, whereas he is more concerned about what is happening around her. All she wants is to get everything back the way it was. But she feels Moss cannot keep the promise of making it happen. As she says “No we wont. I’ve thought about it. It’s a false god.” Carla Jean does not believe that it can be sorted. The good of the money will not be enough, it brings with it too much danger. All Carla Jean wants is to go back to the way it was when they had less money, but also a less dangerous life.

In the end, Moss makes her agree to move out of the house as long as he tries to fix everything. However, neither of them seems very sure if Moss can come up with a solution. Moss’s end sentence conveys all the uncertainty, affection and care they have for each other. “I just know I cant trust nobody else. I’ll call you tomorrow. I didnt think they’d find you up there or I never would of sent you. I’ll call you tomorrow” (McCarthy 182). The dialogues between Carla Jean and Moss show affection, but little is revealed to Carla Jean about what is

going on. As a reader we understand that Moss is in trouble what he realises in the end too. The number Moss is going to call is the number he got from Wells and in the end this action leads to the death of Wells and Moss. The conversation between Moss and Chigurh also signs the death sentence for Carla Jean and shows Moss as the character he is. He realises the only option that he has is to try and find Chigurh before Chigurh finds Carla Jean. He does not have any option - as he sees it and understands there is no way he can save himself without trying to hunt Chigurh.

To comprehend how important Carla Jean is to Moss and what effect that dialogue has on him, one can look at the previous dialogue between Moss and Wells. Here, Moss - as usual - reveals little information and fear about the situation he is in. Every time Wells tries to help him, Moss turns him down: "I dont need you to do me no favours" or stating that Wells is "full of shit" (McCarthy 151). Moss categorically denies to need help and only agrees to call him. Significantly he calls Carla Jean before asking for help.

But what makes him call for help? Maybe Moss believes Wells when he tells him "You think you wont call me but you will. Just dont wait too long. That money belongs to my client. Chigurh is an outlaw. Time's not on your side. We can even let you keep some of it. But if I have to recover the funds from Chigurh then it will be too late for you. Not to mention your wife" (McCarthy 157). After hearing again that he is in trouble Moss does not reply. Wells continues: "All right. You might want to call her. When I talked to her she sounded pretty worried" (McCarthy 157), suggesting that the situation has become clear to Moss. However, he does not attempt to call Wells before Carla Jean and it is her worries that make him promise to fix everything by asking people for help.

The dialogue shows that only Carla Jean can make Moss change his mind. He does not believe he requires Well's help before Carla Jean is involved. When he talks to Chigurh it is the threat of hurting Carla Jean what makes Moss promise to come and look for him. It

might be stupid to do so, but it underlines his affectionate character perfectly. During the narrative Moss has acted on emotions alone. He will not let anybody else change his mind. His actions and dialogues make sense to the audience and the reader according to the personality that we get to know through his dialogues. He is a man who takes an opportunity, a war veteran from Vietnam, has had a pretty hard life, but is not inhuman. For instance he goes back out to the Mexican with water, even though he knows this is a very stupid thing to do. When Carla Jean tells him that “I want things to be like they was” (McCarthy 182). He makes that promise to her and tries to get out of what he has started even though he cannot keep that promise.

The Coen brothers have done the same thing with Moss as with Chigurh regarding dialogues. It has been shortened and they have made it more to the point. For instance in his last conversation with Carla Jean, Moss does not show any weakness in the movie. He just simply says: “With you gone and I don’t have the money, he can’t touch me. But I can sure touch him. After I find him I’ll come and join you” (McCarthy 94). There is no agreement between the two characters in trying to sort out the situation and get help. There is just Moss staying in control and trying to show that he knows what he is doing to his wife.

The cut down on dialogue in the movie is intriguing. As mentioned earlier this is not uncommon. In the western movie genre there has been a belief that action speaks louder than words. However, what makes this situation unique is the background of a novel that already contains little dialogue or description of characters. The Coen brothers have decided to solve this problem by taking one side of the character and keeping it, seemingly leaving others behind. Probably making individuals more convincing to the audience as their dialogues reflect their actions. As a counterpoint one could argue that this transforms characters into one-sided and rather simple persons, the audience knows how the characters will act and what will happen next. When adapting a novel directors have to make a decision about how much

to include and how to create the adaptation. If the Coen brothers had chosen to portray every side of a character, more dialogue and scenes had to be included resulting in a longer movie. Inevitably it leaves the audience bewildered about characters and the movie all together as there is lots of information to understand. It is a novel's strength that a reader can move back and forth easily. If you do not understand or remember something you can go back and find out. If you want to look at previous statements made by a character you can read them again. It is also easier to put down a book and resume it. Movies are not like that: you sit through the whole movie, at home few viewers skip back and forth and review scenes from earlier on. The Coen brothers have shortened dialogues and cut out scenes in order for the movie to flow on screen. Even so, sometimes what we perceive on screen shows what we need to know about a character.

One example is the scene where Moss has finished his call with Carla Jean and is about to telephone Wells in order to get some help. Instead, the phone is picked up by Chigurh. The Coen brothers left out the dialogue where Moss agrees with Carla Jean to get help. However, the viewer understands this has happened as the phone rings with Wells and Chigurh in the same room and hears Moss's voice at the other end of the phone. So we gather that Moss has realized he needs help, and has understood Carla Jean's concerns about the situation they are in. All this information is something the audience gets within the 10 seconds the shot of Chigurh on the phone lasts (Coen time: 1:20.19). If there was any doubt about Moss's feelings concerning the situation and his affection for Carla Jean, the Coen brothers added Moss slamming the telephone when the conversation is finished.

Ed Tom Bell and Carson Wells

In *No Country for Old Men* there are two other characters that are fascinating in terms of dialogue. Ed Tom Bell and Carson Wells are characters who have few similarities between

them but who are special in terms of their role compared to Chigurh, Moss and Carla Jean. Carson Wells was already mentioned in relation to Moss and Chigurh, however the analysis has mostly been on the reactions of other participants within the dialogue. Bell on the other hand plays a peculiar role in the novel. Especially in terms of dialogue and narrative.

Often, Chigurh is ahead of the game and knows how the plot will progress. Moss ranks between Chigurh and Bell as the latter seems in many ways distant from the actual plot even though he is the one who is in charge of solving the crime. For instance Bell never meets either the protagonist or antagonist in person. Neither does he meet them in conversation. He only accesses their personality through other characters and his investigations. His connection to Moss is mainly through his wife Carla Jean. In the dialogue they have together, Bell acts pessimistic about Moss and his chances of survival. "These people will kill him, Carla Jean. They won't quit" (McCarthy 127). Bell has realised he cannot help Moss as he is in with people who are dangerous to deal with. Towards Carla Jean he makes it seem as if he is making progress in the case, but it is only his last hope in order to help Moss. Carla Jean is suspicious about Bell's true ambitions and if he is capable of doing what he promises to do. When Bell makes a speech about how he was hired to look after people and he gets "... paid to be the first one hurt. Killed, for that matter. I'd better care" (McCarthy 133). Carla Jean's response is one of disbelief and suspicion "You're asking me to believe what you say. But you're the one sayin it" (McCarthy 133). She sees through the heroic impression of the sheriff. As the story progresses, the reader understands how right she is.

Much of Bell's character is about running away or simply not dealing with matters that concern his life. Through different chapters we learn more about the life he has lived and of mistakes he has made. It is not until page 263 out of 309 where he leaves to see his uncle Ellis that we learn why Bell is running away. This is also the most engaging dialogue Bell has in relation to narrative and other figures. Up until this point, Bell is making little sense.

Apparently Bell does not deserve the medal of honour he has received from his actions in The Second World War. He did not stay and fight the Germans, rather ran out on his friends in the dark. As his uncle says, it would not have made any difference if he had chosen to stay and fight. The problem Bell has is that “If I was supposed to die over there doin what I’d given my word to do then that’s what I should of done. You can tell it any way you want but that’s the way it is” (McCarthy 278). In one way Bell feels he has escaped from what was supposed to be, he has changed what was in order for him, but now suffers from the consequences for the rest of his life. “I didnt know you could steal your own life” (McCarthy 278). Saving his life that night by leaving his friends behind has left him with no life after all.

There is a similarity to Chigurh here: Chigurh felt he wanted to see if he could change his own faith, Bell on the other hand cannot forget that he broke a promise he has made to his friends. Another aspect is the conflict within him about what his father would have done instead of running away. As his uncle says “He’d of set there till hell froze over and then stayed a while on the ice” (McCarthy 279). Continuing the dialogue, Ellis tries to persuade Bell that if Jack had been born in this time maybe he would have had a different view of the matter, something that Bell doubts, but in the end reaches the conclusion that he is “... not the man of an older time they say I am. I wish I was. I’m a man of this time” (McCarthy 279). For the reader this is an important comment. Having been given the impression throughout that Bell is a man who holds principles of an older generation - a golden generation that fought in the war, against evil and for democracy - collapses. Bell’s impression now is different from the one in the beginning. This leads back to the title of the novel and underlines the role it plays on the characters and dialogues.

Wells, through dialogue, is also interesting, especially comparing him with genre and the kind of character he is playing. His dialogue with Moss and Chigurh is the most reveals much about his character. Judging by his first dialogues, Wells is a character who has

confidence in his own ability to perform the job he is hired for. For example when he is confronted about how bad “The invincible Mr Chigurh” (McCarthy 140) is, he replies “Compared to what? the bubonic plague? He’s bad enough that you called me. He’s a psychopathic killer but so what? There’s plenty of them around” (McCarthy 141). For Wells there is little doubt that he is able to do the job and the reader gets the same impression. Wells is hired to hunt Chigurh down as he is the only person that may be able to stop him.

He speaks as if he knows every move of Chigurh and how prepared he is, keeps repeating to Moss that he is the only person to help him. Also, Wells drops information about how Moss was found, where his wife is and knows details he should not know. Moreover Wells has insight into the character and principles of Chigurh.

“You cant make a deal with him. Let me say it again. Even if you gave him the money he’d still kill you. There’s no one alive on this planet that’s ever had even a cross word with him. They’re all dead. These are not good odds. He’s a peculiar man. You could even say he has principles. Principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that” (McCarthy 153).

Wells knows, if Moss had a plan of giving him the money it still would not work. It is hard to decide whether or not Wells speaks the truth as the reader has been given an impression of Chigurh already.

It is not until Wells meets Chigurh that we understand more of Wells’ real character. So far Wells has been preaching about how he can solve the situation and to compose yourself when faced with Chigurh. When he himself faces him, Wells breaks many of his own rules. He tries to pay Chigurh off even though he has told Moss that it will not be a solution. He follows every pattern other victims of Chigurh have shown before. As it turns out, Wells is a talker. He is good in his profession as a hit-man, but he differs from Chigurh drastically. He talks a lot, enjoys money and does not have many principles. The character of Wells is

standard in both literature and the movies. There are several examples of villains who talk too much, making too many jokes and end up not winning, especially within the western genre. Like Eli Wallach who plays “The ugly” in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. He is the villain with a heart, but who in the end is after the money. Therefore he does not really succeed in either being the hero or the villain. Other semi-protagonists like Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* act in similar functions. Both characters are neither bad nor good.

Clothing and appearance intensify this impression. When Wells sits next to Moss at the hospital he is dressed in a blue suit and holds flowers. Even though he speaks in an earnest voice and his remarks are serious in content one cannot help to find some humour in the scene and the character of Wells. This is underlined when he replies to Moss's statement about Chigurh being the ultimate bad-ass “I guess I'd say he doesn't have a sense of humour” (Coen time: 44:43). His jokes are therefore much stronger in the cinematic version. In the dialogue between Chigurh and Wells, Chigurh opens up and explains why he has let himself be captured by a police officer. In the movie this part of the dialogue is cut out, presumably in order for the character of Chigurh to be maintained throughout. The Coen brothers have left a character trait in Chigurh suggesting his view of how actions and rules you follow in life will be accounted for in the end. Wells is left as a begging character torn between trying to get out of the situation and calling Chigurh a psychopath.

Bell's role is also a familiar one. The local sheriff who can do little about situations evolving around him is a character quite common for western novels and movies. The way Bell talks to other characters suggests he is a person who does not know how to solve the current situation. What is unique about Bell's character in comparison to other western sheriffs is his previous history and guilt. In the movie, the dialogue between Bell and his uncle Ellis is reduced. The part where Bell explains that he was not a war hero is left out of

the screenplay. The question is what impression of Bell this leaves. Through this dialogue it comes across that he is quitting because he feels overmatched and discouraged by Chigurh.

Conclusion

Although as quite a few critics and indeed McCarthy himself noted, the adaptation is close to the original novel one can argue that the dialogue is not as close. What then is intriguing is how the movie manages to stay so close thematically even though much of the dialogue is cut down. I would argue that in *No Country for Old Men* it comes down to how similar the characterisation is. Considering Chigurh for instance, much of the moral justification and his ideas about how to live your life are taken away from the movie, leaving the audience with a sociopathic killer, who enjoys tormenting his victims before taking their lives and who also seems unbeatable. What the audience therefore might struggle to understand is how Chigurh has decided to come to become such a character. Through dialogue the reasoning behind his actions are left out, so the Coen brothers rely of getting the thematic idea across through other means. If the thematic idea is supposed to be that society is going to in the wrong direction in America, the Coen brothers eventually rely on the audience to understand that through mise-en-scene, audio or other characters.

Looking at Moss's character in terms of dialogue we get the impression of a more assertive character, confident in his ability to get the job done, even though the audience might understand that he is not. When he speaks, his words describe him as a man full of confidence, who has a bizarre affection for his wife and is a good man. This affection is strengthened by the removal of the scene with the young hitchhiker girl, showing him as a more compassionate man and one who honours his marriage.

Bell stands out as the character who is the opposite of Chigurh. I would argue that Bell suffers the same treatment that Chigurh does in the movie. What dialogue Bell has that

offers insight into why he is overmatched and incapable of dealing with Chigurh is left out. This strengthens the impression of Chigurh and therefore increases the darkness of the movie. So although thematically much is kept, I would argue that in the adaptation there is an intensified feeling of the content and that the audience does not get a similar insight into why this is, which may be the reason why the audience is a bit confused, as Braudy argues.

(Braudy 2008)

CHAPTER III: *THE ROAD*

Although written the following year, and by the same author, *The Road* differs from *No Country for Old Men* in several respects. One of them is that *The Road* was written for McCarthy's son and is supposed to reflect their relationship. There is a fundamental difference in narrative and plot compared to *No Country for Old Men*. As McCarthy himself said, when Oprah Winfrey asked McCarthy if he would have written the novel without his son being borne, McCarthy replies: "Never would have occurred to me to try and write a book about a father and a son" (McCarthy, Cormac. Interview with Oprah Winfrey). The setting is different: a post apocalyptic world where everything is dark, gloomy and cold, and where storms are fierce. The plot is a quest of going south as we follow a man and his son. It is not a story of hit-men who stop for nothing or individuals who do not fit in, but a story about survival, affection and human trust.

The reader meets a father and son who are alone and walking south in order to find food and better weather to survive. It starts with a retrospective first person narrative and the reader quickly understands that it is a world where little of what used to be is left and life is all about staying alive. The narration is first person from the perspective of the father, so there is arguably a similarity between the father figure in *The Road* and Ed Tom Bell in *No Country for Old Men*. The second character is the son, who accompanies the nameless father and is the sole reason the father tries to stay alive. Through flashbacks the reader learns about the mother of the child and the wife of the man and it becomes clear that the son was born into the apocalyptic world. The novel has few dramatic climaxes, there are a few instances where the action gets very intense, violence and brutality is constantly around, mixed with touching moments of feeling, emotion, empathy between the main characters. When comparing this

Country for Old Men. Dialogue is, however, even scarcer than in *No Country for Old Men*.

This is something that I will return to later on.

Auteur, Genre and Audience

As already mentioned, there are differences compared to *No Country for Old Men*. One of those differences being that the author created a novel with regard to his own son. This is very interesting in relation to the role of the auteur in adaptations. If a work has a special meaning to the author, the author will have a closer relation with his work because of personal affections. On the other hand, one could argue that as the novel gets released, it will have to face readers interpretations so perhaps the work is not very personal after all. The auteur pictures the narrative when writing, just as the reader pictures it while reading. Such an image of narrative will be stronger when something very personal is involved. When adapting a novel to the screen there are always issues to consider for the “new” auteur. The process is much harder when the role of personal affection from the previous auteur is stronger than in a normal novel. Director John Hillcoat and screenwriter Joe Penhall had to take this into consideration when adapting the novel into a screenplay. How does the second auteur adapt a novel that is already very personal and how do you make it appealing to the cinema audience? Granted, McCarthy will have felt that the novel is not just suitable for his son, the plot is something that many can relate to otherwise why not just give it to his son and not publish the novel? However, when adapting something that is so personal, how do you keep the personal touch without losing the interest of the audience?

In the movie the relationship between father and son is strengthened by brief dialogues, strangely the silence after every comment in the novel makes the love they have seem stronger. The sentences are brief and the message behind is stripped of any elaborations. Since words are scarce, the silence following the few words there are makes them stand out and

gives them a greater effect. In modern cinema history little dialogue combined with little action have often either been overlooked or classified a movie as too narrow for a large audience. However, there are examples which prove the opposite. One year before *The Road* was released, *Wall-E* had remarkable success. There is a sequence of 22 minutes where there is no conversations or spoken words. The audience is following the robot Wall-E and him alone. Perhaps what makes little dialogue work in *Wall-E* is that it is animated and that the main characters are robots. The success of *The Road* and the dialogue in the movie has, as with *No Country for Old Men*, much to do with genre and how dialogue works according to genre. The genre in *The Road* is, as with many contemporary movies, hard to define. It is close to drama but also a thriller with certain elements of adventure; adventure in relation to the characters moving on along the road almost in an exploring way. By sticking to these genres and adopting a strict mise-en-scene, it is easier to follow the short but precise bits of dialogue.

Another aspect in which *The Road* differs from *No Country for Old Men* is the mise-en-scene. The expression of the movie is post-apocalyptic, it is a world that leaves little room for happiness, colour or brightness. If a character does not have much prospect of surviving or is close to death, conversations will not be long and probably about vital things so you do not waste too much energy.

The relation between the two main characters is quite unique to look on when comparing *The Road* with *No Country for Old Men*. The family relation between father and son changes how they talk to each other. As they know each other well more can be said without saying all, mimicry will more easily give away what they feel and what they are thinking. Age difference also affects the dialogue between the two characters, the father can hide (his real thoughts) to protect his son by diverting the attention to something else. For instance when they are close to starvation.

Are we going to die now?

No.

What are we going to do?

We're going to drink some water. Then we're going to keep going down the road.

Okay (McCarthy 2007:74),

The father uses the trust his son has in him and that he is older and smarter. There is at least some evidence of this in the novel, but towards the end we get more and more the feeling that the son also understands what his father is trying to hide.

Do you think I lie to you?

No.

But you think I might lie to you about dying.

Yes.

Okay. I might. But we're not dying.

Okay (McCarthy: 86).

The boy starts to see more through his father and understands more about their situation. Even though he still believes his father and trusts him, he has begun to understand that the gravest meanings sometimes are hidden by his dad.

The reactions of the audience to *The Road* are divided. Looking at the box office figures and critical reception this is clear. It was less popular in terms of viewing figures and box office sales than *No Country for Old Men*. *No Country for Old Men*, with a budget of \$25 million, made \$74 million in the USA by April the 6th 2010 alone. In comparison *The Road* had a budget of \$20 million and grossed \$8,1 million by 7th March 2010. Intriguingly, *The Road* did much better internationally. Box office figures worldwide amounted to \$27,6 million (Boxofficemojo.com 25.04.2011), so the movie did make money. Comparing in percentage how much of the budget the movie made from domestic sales with the foreign

sales, the domestic sales make up for 29,4% while foreign sales make up 70,6% of the total grosses (Boxofficemojo.com). Similarly *No Country for Old Men* made 43,3% of the gross total of the domestic and 56,7% of the foreign market (Boxofficemojo.com). Clearly, *The Road* is less successful in total, but did much better abroad than in the USA. One could argue that the movie fits the audience better, especially the United Kingdom, Spain and France, the nations where it was particularly successful (Boxofficemojo.com). Future research might bring more definite results about why it was more popular in foreign countries than in the USA. One factor that stands out instantly is the release date in the US. *The Road* was released officially on 25 of November 2009 after having been shown at some festivals. Moving the release date close to Christmas put it up against blockbusters, usually released around that time. The year 2009, the films *2012* (13th of November) and *Avatar* (18th of November) were released. As a rather dark and gloomy film, *The Road* had difficulties to fit in with the spirit of Christmas. Also, the movie had to compete against movies which were given a lot of attention by the press such as *Avatar* and *2012*. To shift the release date from the 16th of October to the 25th of November might have happened in order to make *The Road* compete for the Oscars. The Weinstens Co moved their other film planned to be released on that date to late December proving that they believed *The Road* to be a strong contender for an Oscar.

There are other reasons why *The Road* did not get positive reactions by the audience. One reason is that its trailer conveys contents the movie does not deliver. The trailer gives the impression that *The Road* is an action movie as it adds a violent aspect to it. Therefore, the trailer puts *The Road* into the same genre as *2012* or *Mad Max* by including scenes which focus on danger around the main characters - almost as if they are hunted by others. Another fault of the trailer is how it depicts the wife. Indeed, the wife has an important role for the two main characters in both novel and movie. However, the trailer portrays her as being ever present compared to flashbacks used in the movie. It confuses the audience because they

watch a movie they did not expect judging by the trailer. Regardless, the movie received good reviews prior to release and was well rated by the audience at IMDB, with 7,4 out of 10 (IMDB.com 08.05.2011).

In the adaptation there are some differences that are important to point out. The film critic Mark Kermode projected *The Road* to be a novel that was very hard to adapt and perhaps even unadaptable (Kermode:15.03.2011). The novel follows multiple narratives which is hard to realise on screen without confusing the audience. John Hillcoat therefore focuses on the relationship between father and son instead of the violent themes of the novel. (For instance by leaving out some rather graphic episode from the cannibalism house)

It also avoided a raise in the age limitation of the movie as some of these scenes would have been very graphical and disturbing for audiences. By leaving some violent scenes out, the movie received a R instead of a NC 17 which would have excluded more audience members. The exclusion of these graphic scenes does not really affect the movie, but if an audience member had seen the trailer before going to see the movie without having read the novel the audience member would not be getting the experience he or she had anticipated.

Dialogue in *The Road*

The dialogue in *The Road* is, as stated, short and precise and it does not give away too much information about the actual narrative. There are important points to note in comparison to *No Country for Old Men* and how Hillcoat and Joe Penhall (screenwriter) adapted the novel and solved dialogue issues in the adaptation.

One of their unconventional choices is the use of voiceover. The novel offers several chances to use voiceover, whereas in a novel, the narrator takes this role. As a concept, the use of voiceover is brilliant for the cinema. As François Jost mentions in *The Look: From Film to Novel - An Essay in Comparative Narratology*:

The cinema has two physical tracks - the image track and the sound track - so one easily imagines that film can simultaneously express what is seen - through the image track - and what is thought - through voice-over. The difference between seeing and feeling and knowing is almost semiotic difference: it is possible to show someone or something and at the same time express something completely different through the voice (Jost 2004).

However, voiceover has been looked down on by most filmmakers as an easy way to avoid extra work on the screenplay or characters. Not only filmmakers dislike the use of voiceover, as Xan Brooks shows when reviewing *The Road* “Admittedly, in dramatising McCarthy's bare-bones prose, Hillcoat sometimes runs the risk of over-dramatising (I could have done without the plaintive music and the unnecessary slabs of explanatory voiceover)” (Brooks 2009). The argument is that voiceover can normally be made into dialogue. It tends to imply a documentary genre, which may be why filmmakers have feared it for so long and that may be why Brooks does not like the “explanatory voiceover”.

Hillcoat uses the voiceover in a creative way which leaves an impressive effects on the audience. I have already stated how voiceover normally comes from the film narrator, how it is intriguing in *The Road* is how it creates a distance between the audience, the narrator and the violence around. Lothe mentions Edward Bullough and how distance is defined as :
 ”Distancing means the separation of personal affections, whether idea or complex experience, from the concrete personality of the experience” (Lothe 35). For example in *The Road* the voiceover states: “Within a year there were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. The screams of the murdered. By day the dead impaled on spikes along the road” (Penhall 4). Clearly the distance the father has from these events are set up, but hearing instead of seeing also leaves a less brutal image with the audience. Hearing about it from the narrator also distances the father and son from these events. Also, the voiceover illustrates the relationship

between father and son. “Sometimes I tell the boy old stories of courage and justice - difficult as they are to remember. All I know is the child is my warrant and if he is not the word of God, then God never spoke” (Penhall 6). In *The Road* the voiceover is does not give the movie a feeling of being a documentary, it is effective in creating distance between characters and events that are around them, while illustrating the thoughts the father has about bringing up a child in this world. Therefore the audience also gets a distance from brutal events, while the affectionate message is intensified and a deeper side to the father character comes across.

The main characters are engaging when looking at how dialogue works between them. I have already mentioned how they are family and how age difference has an effect upon their dialogue, but there are some more points to discuss. One of the central points relating to the dialogue is the way the father tries to hide parts of reality from his son. He does so in order to protect his son and to prevent him from getting anxious because of the danger lurking around them.

Another topic in the dialogues is the relationship between father and son and the danger that lurks around them. The father preaches to his son that they are the good guys and that the others are the bad guys. He keeps reminding his son about this by saying that they carry the fire (McCarthy:71). Eventually, his son becomes terrified about being killed, taken away by the bad guys or becoming like them. The first conversation about a dog shows this fear of being bad from the boy.

It's a dog, he said.

A dog?

Yes.

Where did it come from?

I dont know.

We're not going to kill it?

We wont hurt the dog, he said. I promise (McCarthy:69-70).

But behind this constant preaching awaits something more sinister. The father knows that his son will be on his own one day, that he cannot keep his promise of protecting him forever. He tries to teach his son everything there is to know before he passes away so that his son has a fair chance to survive in this world.

There is less dialogue in *The Road* than in *No Country for Old Men*. There are fewer characters in *The Road* and therefore dialogues become scarcer even though characters do not talk less with each other. Dialogues mainly illustrate the relationship between father and son without too much elaboration. There are however a few of these dialogues where the relationship between them is well illustrated without too much elaboration. There are also fascinating dialogues about the philosophy and ethics of the apocalyptic world between the father and characters they meet on the road. These dialogues are a counterpoint to dialogues that take place between the father and his wife. The world that used to be is referred to by dialogues and description about the life the father had with his wife and their new born son.

The Father and Son Dialogues

When talking to his son, the father takes an educational attitude. A short dialogue takes place after father and son have witnessed terrifying scenes around them. “Just remember that the things you put into your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.” When his son asks him if you might not forget some of it his father replies “Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget”(McCarthy:10). This is a typical dialogue between father and son. The father keeps teaching his son about life and challenges that come with it. It also shows the high level of reasoning he attempts to make his son understand. Considering the age of the boy, the statement mentioned is at a high level of reflection. One could discuss whether or not the son receives this advice and if he understands

the reference to mental challenges at the time. The father is obviously referring to some incidents concerning him himself. These images are not simply images of death and decay but may perhaps also refer to relations with other characters. It is a comment which shows the reader more of the character without much explanation, it shows a depth to the father that we now know is there, but we do not know what exactly is there.

Another example of such a dialogue is when the father has found a can of Coca Cola and gives it to his son. After the son has had a sip he offers it back to his father and wants him to have some as well. Reluctantly, the father takes a sip and then hands it back saying “You drink it, he said. Let’s just sit here”(McCarthy:20), to which the son replies “It is because I wont ever get to drink another one, isnt it?”(McCarthy:20). This shows that the son makes progress in understanding the character of his father at least to the point where he can interpret expressions and the reasons behind them. The father replies “Ever is a long time”(McCarthy:20), which is another statement that requires analysis. Whether the son is able to do this, is open to discussion as his reply “Okay” could be interpreted either way.

“Okay” is an important word throughout the novel. “Okay” can mean that you do understand a point and agree with it. A definition of okay is “Expressing agreement or acquiescence” (Oxford concise dictionary). However, it could also be interpreted as a false agreement in order to get out of a situation. Also, it can be a way to show that you understand the situation whereas in reality you do not. “Okay” as a response to the remark about “ever” being a long time is engaging as it can be debated how much the son understands of his father’s remark. This remark clearly has two sides to it. It can be looked at as a comment that is supposed to kindle the son’s emotions. He may have another taste again in his life, “ever” is a very long time and one can never be certain what is going to happen in such a long time. It can also be a comment regarding what comes after life. There are dialogues and elements in the novel that point towards the fact that the father believes in a life after death where you are

reunited and live a good life. At one point the father has a conversation that suggests religious aspects as he is saying “Are you there? Will I see you at the last? Have you a neck by which I can throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God he whispered. Oh God” (McCarthy:10). It is arguable therefore that the father may refer to the life after death. To what extent his son understands this is questionable and in that sense the reply “okay” would be meant to pretend that he understands, but really does not.

The son uses “okay” several times throughout the story, the meaning behind “okay” evolves as well as the narrative and the son. When son and father talk about how long roads will last, the father says :”I dont know. Maybe quite a while. There’s nothing to uproot them so they should be okay for a while”(McCarthy:37). Because of his mental development the son queries “but there wont be any cars or trucks on them”(McCarthy:37). Instead of simply accepting his father’s remark. His father confirms his opinion and the following “okay” has a affirmative meaning. The son understands what his father has told him and instead of asking more questions he accepts the explanation given. Conversations where “okay” is used also clarify to the reader what the situation is as further into the narrative “okay” is often used as a reply to confirm facts.

In the novel there are several dialogues between father and son that not only concern the son’s education, but also offer insight into the life the father has and has had. This helps the reader to put scenes between father and mother into context and show the mental challenges of the experiences he has had. For instance, when the father cannot stop coughing and therefore moves away from his sleeping son. When he returns, his son is awake and the conversation they have reveals information about father, son and mother.

I’m sorry, he said.

It’s okay.

Go to sleep.

I wish I was with my mom.

You mean you wish you were dead.

Yes.

You musnt say that.

But I do.

Dont say that. It's a bad thing to say.

I cant help it.

I know. But you have to.

How do I do it?

I dont know (McCarthy:46-47).

During this conversation the reader is able to pick up on several points. First, that the father says “sorry”. Seemingly, he apologises for waking his son with his coughing. However, it is also possible that he apologises for leaving him behind with no protection. The son does not seem to be concerned about waking up or being left alone. What he wants is to be with his mother. This is the first time the son mentions his mother. Presumably he does so because his father has shouted out her name while coughing. How much the son remembers of his mother is not clear, but after a pause from the father it is understood that he at least knows she is dead. The crushing words that are being said by the son are obviously hard to handle for the father and all he can say is that he must not wish for death. The question is how not to think of death considering the world they live in. Neither the son nor his father knows how to avoid it. For the reader the situation seems hopeless. The son wishes to be dead while the father is not capable of putting the thoughts of death behind him. Nevertheless, the thoughts still haunt him while dreaming for instance when he wakes up from a nightmare : “They stood on the far

shore of a river and called to him. Tattered gods slouching in their rags across the waste” (McCarthy:44).

What the reader also experiences from these dialogues is that the son is getting more and more interested in what his father has to say and asks more questions regarding what is being said. When they arrive at an abandoned trailer, the father assumes it is empty and that somebody would have cut a hole in it by now. Instead of accepting the statement, the son queries “What would they cut it with?” (McCarthy:39). This shows his interest in learning about and understanding the world around him. The progress of the son continues throughout the narrative and after a while he begins to take the initiative to have conversations his father.

Did you have any friends?

Yes. I did.

Lots of them?

Yes.

Do you remember them?

Yes. I remember them.

What happened to them?

They died.

All of them?

Yes. All of them.

Do you miss them?

Yes. I do.

Where are we going?

We’re going south.

Okay (McCarthy:50-51).

The son shows interest in the life his father used to have and how his family used to live. Perhaps he asks question because of his infantile desire to hear stories about the past or the good life which used to be. However, in this world there are no good stories. His father assures him that his friends are all dead, and he misses them. The son's acceptance of such a statement suggests that he is more used to the world they live in. He is not surprised by his father's statements, he rather moves on, back to the here and now and what they are doing. Ending the dialogue with "okay" proves his understanding and acceptance of their plan.

What stops the son progressing through dialogue is that his father performs an action which he does not support. These acts often put them in jeopardy or they are selfish acts from the father that will keep the two of them safe. An example is offered by the situation where they encounter a person struck by lightning, who is dying. The father decides they cannot help him so they walk on. The son is crushed by this, even though he understands they themselves will die if they help the man. Situations like this alter dialogues between father and son. The son closes up and almost stops talking to his dad, while his father tries to initiate conversations over and over again. Another occasion where the boy shuts down is when his father has to kill a man in self-defense. It takes a long time for the two of them to have conversations again and when they finally are able to, the level of conversation has gone back to basics.

I want you to wait here, he said. I'm going for wood. We have to have a fire.

I'm scared.

I know. But I'll just be a little ways and I'll be able to hear you so if you get scared you call me and I'll come right away.

I'm really scared.

The sooner I go the sooner I'll be back and we'll have a fire and then you wont be scared anymore. Dont lie down. If you lie down you'll fall asleep and then if I call you you wont answer and I wont be able to find you. Do you understand?

The boy didnt answer. He was close to losing his temper with him and then he realized that he was shaking his head in the dark. Okay, he said. Okay (McCarthy: 61).

The son conveys a feeling of fright after a stranger grabbed him so his dad had to shoot the offender. It is almost as if he transforms into a younger child and the dad once again has to start giving out directional orders of what he is supposed to do. What the reader can understand from this is that whenever real danger is around the father goes back to basic dialogue. In other words there are not so much two parts in the dialogue, but rather one part, which gives orders and the other which has to follow them. One could say that this is natural for many conversations. There is one person who talks and the other person listens besides, the father is the most experienced, stronger and more intelligent one. Yet when there is no danger the line between father and son becomes less distinct. Dialogues are resumed after a while, but to deliver a message from father to son takes time. The first conversation between the two after this incident shows the reader how the boy has turned around.

I should have been more careful, he said.

The boy didnt answer.

You have to talk to me.

Okay.

You wanted to know what the bad guys looked like. Now you know. It may happen again. My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand?

Yes.

He sat there cowered in the blanket. After a while he looked up. Are we still the good guys? he said.

Yes. We're still the good guys.

And we always will be.

Yes. We always will be.

Okay. (McCarthy:65-66).

Whenever both characters come into dangerous situations the son starts to question if they are good or bad. A challenging question because one can understand his doubts. After all they are the ones who killed a man. He was seemingly not a good man, but how could the father be sure that he was not a good guy? Maybe he grabbed the boy because he felt threatened by the father who pointed a gun at him. As a child such incidents may force you to question the belief about who is good or bad. It is not until the son has distanced himself from the killing that he is able to question his dad and get the reassurance he needs about whether or not they are good.

The dad's argument about being appointed by God to protect his son is also an intriguing one. It brings up religious elements in the novel. The father mentions and alludes to God on several occasions throughout the novel, but this is the clearest so far. The concept of protecting a son because he is appointed by God to do so not only shows the reader the close connection between father and God. It also brings up the question of religious justification for the actions one performs. What this means to the reader is that the father obviously tries to bring up his son according to religious concepts of right and wrong. However, the balance between right and wrong is hard to keep up as making the right decisions is not easy when there is a constant struggle for food, water and survival. There is a close resemblance between the connection the father has with God to the one God has with Jesus. It is almost as if the

father believes he is on a mission to bring good to the world. If only he can make his son survive with the right ideals about right and wrong there is hope for mankind in this world. We know death is closing in on the father so in one way it is almost as if he is sacrificing himself in order to save his child.

Related to the notion that they are the good guys is the concept of “fire” in the dialogues between father and son.

What is it, Papa?

Nothing. We’re okay. Go to sleep.

Were going to be okay aren't we Papa?

Yes. We are.

And nothing bad is going to happen to us.

That’s right.

Because we’re carrying the fire.

Yes. Because we’re carrying the fire (McCarthy:70).

Both father and son use the term in order to confirm that they are good, but also that they will manage to survive in this world. “Fire” can also relate to the will to live. As long as the fire burns inside them, both still want to live. Later, when the father is dead, the reader sees how important the concept of “fire” is to the child. I will return to this dialogue later.

At one point in *The Road* the setting changes so conversations become different to the usual dialogues between father and son. When both father and son find a bunker which is stocked with food they suddenly find themselves in a safe environment. Being in such safe surroundings alters the dialogues between them. The conversation during their first proper meal for several days goes like this

Go ahead, he said. Don't let it get cold

What do I eat first?

Whatever you like.

Is this coffee?

Yes. Here. You put the butter on your biscuits. Like this.

Okay.

Are you all right?

I dont know.

Do you feel okay?

Yes.

What is it?

Do you think we should thank the people?

The people?

The people who gave us all this.

Well. Yes, I guess we could do that.

Will you do it?

Why dont you?

I dont know how.

Yes you do. You know how to say thank you.

Dear people, thank you for all this food and stuff. We know that you saved it for yourself and if you were here we wouldnt eat it no matter how hungry we were and we're sorry that you didnt get to eat it and we hope that you're safe in heaven with God.

He looked up. Is that okay? he said.

Yes. I think that's okay (McCarthy:122-123).

There are several important points to make about this dialogue. First, it is remarkable to see how unsure the boy is about the process of eating. It is almost as if he is attending a fancy

dinner party and does not know what to do or how to behave. Another point is the conscience the boy has. He is the one who takes the initiative to thank for the food and in the beginning his father does not seem to regard it as important. He says “we could do that” and also makes his boy say thank you. This might be because he does not want to say thank you, but more likely it is because he wants to continue the education of his son and make sure he learns how to do and say things on his own. Once again there is the mention of God and heaven. The aspect of religion works in order to show the reader that in a world where nothing of society and civilisation is left what remains is the religious notion of what is good and right.

In the adaptation much of the dialogue between father and son stays the same. Granted, some conversations have been combined with others and the two characters talk less. This is essential for the cinema screen, because otherwise the result would have been a far too long movie. Also, Penhall has changed the order of dialogues. For instance, the coca cola sequence was moved from the beginning of the novel to the middle of the movie. Regardless of these changes, both father and son carry a similar characteristic throughout the adaptation. The father is caring, educational and responsible towards his son, while the son is a conscious child that is keen to learn and inquires about why things are the way they are. Changes might have been successful because McCarthy set hardly any timeline to the plot. As an example the coca cola scene is not dependant on earlier scenes or dialogues. A similar point can be made about the scene in the old mansion. Still, it is the right decision in terms of discourse to place the scene in the middle of the movie. This is not to say that having it at the start would be right, in terms of discourse it is a good solution to have it in middle. It could have been placed there and the effect would have been attained for the audience.

The effect of changing the order is that it highlights the affection and understanding between father and son. As an example, after the father has killed one gang member, they still argue, but some dialogue is added from the bathing scene before they have the talk about

whether or not they still are the good guys. Flashbacks about the relationship between husband and wife shape an even richer image of the father. For instance, between running away from the gang members and the bathing scene, there is a flashback to a conversation between husband and wife. These scenes strengthen the audience's relation to the father as they show his affection and bring us closer to understanding his desire to keep the family together.

Father and Mother Dialogues

In the novel, dialogues between the man and his wife are what give us additional insight into the life that used to be. The conversations are accompanied by descriptions and narrations about how it used to be, but they also give the reader an insight into why the father has changed. The dialogue I will now look at is the one where the wife has decided to take her own life and leave son and husband behind. Quickly, differences between man and wife are established, when the man suggests that they are survivors to which she replies. "What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film" (McCarthy:47). What we gather from this is that she is a brutally honest person. She does not see any good in this world and does not have hope for it to improve. Contradicting her, her husband always believes one should try whereas she has given up. As she says "We used to talk about death, she said. We don't any more. Why is that?... It is because it's here. There's nothing left to talk about" (McCarthy:48). Comforting and protective words from her husband do not seem to help her either "You say you would die for us but what good is that?" (McCarthy:47). It becomes clear to the reader that his wife was a very cold person in the end who does not have any problems with leaving this world and her family behind. She also mentions that she would take her son with her if it was not for him. Her last words seem to intentionally hurt him, explaining that she has taken death as a new lover for it can give her

what he cannot (McCarthy: 48). She also refuses to say goodbye to her son before killing herself.

These conversations shed new light on the man. It is clearer to the reader why he is so protective of his son: it is the only good thing he has left of what used to be. The frankness and directness of the father towards his son also become clearer when judging his character in the light of such a dialogue. If your wife commits suicide, finding love and affection again must be hard.

The dialogue also explains what happens after the bombing and how it affects the people. Clearly, man and wife disagree in their view of where the world is going. The sentence “You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take” (McCarthy:48), sums it all up and shows the reader that the world is divided into good and evil people, but even for survivors with good intentions the mental challenges became too much to handle.

Another aspect of these conversations is the roles man and wife play. Between father and son, the father is stricter and more realistic about their chances and how they are going to survive. At least he is leading the conversations between them. His son is the one who suggests that they should help everyone and perhaps is a little too optimistic about their chances, yet he is often on the defensive in dialogues and so to speak receiving the message rather than delivering it. In the past, role allocations between husband and wife were similar, the husband taking the role of his son and his wife being the dominant part. She is the one who leads the conversations while he is the one who is on the defensive, trying to reason with her, but lacking strong arguments. As she says: “You have no argument because there is none” (McCarthy:49).

Dialogues between wife and husband in the adaptation are intriguing because there are more changes compared to man and son. One change is that dialogues have been divided up to cover more time. In the beginning there is a dialogue between man and wife which

accompanies the man's voiceover in order to portray the world as it was before. The first talk is about taking a bath, his wife assumes he is about to take one as he has filled up the bath tub, but he does not. Penhall has added two sentences compared to the novel.

the WOMAN takes off her nightdress and goes to the bath.

You'll sleep better.

He looks at her, surprised she's misunderstood.

I'm not! Put your clothes back on (Penhall: 2).

To add these two sentences gives the audience a slightly different view of how prepared the husband is compared to his wife. She does not understand what is about to happen. This context suggests a reason for her suicide: she was not prepared for what was about to happen. Through dialogue between husband and wife in the novel, we learn that their son was born into the apocalyptic world as Penhall has written the birth scene into the screenplay. From this dialogue we also learn about the woman's reluctance to give birth. Right before she is about to deliver the child

We don't have to,

Well, I think we probably do.

What kind of life is this?

It's life. It's the only thing left (Penhall: 12).

The scene gives the audience a greater understanding of the struggle she has with giving birth to a child in this world. For dramatic effect a point of view shot has been added when water and blood is running down her leg. The audience is suppose to feel her pain and discontent with having a child. These scenes build up the character of the wife stronger than in the novel, showing her human sides and not as cold as she comes across in the novel. Yet the affection from her husband is still there for the audience and their opposing views are still maintained because much of the dialogue has been retained. Also, her final words portray her

more gently than in the novel. Instead of telling him off, she gives the advice “You should move south. You won’t survive another winter here” (Penhall: 32). He asks her why she will not help him and she replies “I can’t help you. Don’t you understand? This is how I’m helping you” (Penhall: 32). In the end he begs her to stay and she shows signs suggesting this is not easy for her either “Please don’t. Please” (Penhall).

The wife shows little affection and kills herself but through the camera she is given a more human character and her life makes more sense for the audience. Through later flashbacks we see how she cares for the boy and the loss of her beloved piano. She starts out unprepared for what is going to happen, she goes through a hard labour which the audience witnesses and in the end she offers some advice and shows that it is not an easy decision she has taken.

Conversation Between Man and Old Man

One dialogue between the father and a traveller throws more light upon the constant challenges in the post-apocalyptic world. Father and son stumble across an old man on the road and decide to camp near by and share food with him. The old man is in many ways a miracle. He is not supposed to be alive, as he is old, almost blind, has no food and little mobility. It should be impossible for him to survive in this world. Therefore the man is suspicious and at the start much of the conversation reflects this feeling. However, after a dinner around the bonfire they begin to talk. The old man seems like a sceptic, as he says he always knew that the world would come to this, but when asked if he tried to get ready for it he replies “People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didnt believe in that. Tomorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there.” (McCarthy:142)- He seems to believe you can try and get ready as much as you want for what is about to happen, but in the end you can never be prepared. Therefore there is little point in getting ready for

tomorrow or what you think will happen. Even though he seems to not care about his life anymore, he still does explain he does not want to die. “Nobody wants to be here and nobody wants to leave.” (McCarthy:143). This quote illustrates the problem people left on earth have. They are fortunate enough to be survivors in an apocalyptic world, but this is not a world you would want to live in.

Along with the dilemma of staying alive or dying the old man and the father discuss the role of God in the world. The traveller says he thought he had died when he saw the boy, because he did not think he would see a child ever again. The father replies “What if I said that he’s a God?” (McCarthy:145). The reply from the father is a curious one. Perhaps in his eyes, the son is a god, pure, innocent and good. He is his only child and the only thing left from his previous life. However, to suggest such an idea of the child being a god to another character you hardly know is peculiar and what he expects to get out of it one can only speculate on. The response given is regardless one which dismisses such an idea.

I’m past all that now. Have been for years. Where men cant live gods fare no better. You’ll see. It’s better to be alone. So I hope that’s not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing so I hope it’s not true. Things will be better when everybody’s gone. (McCarthy:145).

What he is pointing out is that the concept of religion is made up by people. If people are extinct, the concept of Gods and religion dies with them. When everybody and everything is gone, death will not exist any longer as there is no one left to kill or die. For the old man this is a better world and through this dialogue he points out how everybody struggles: for survival, how to stay good and alive. In this world there is a dilemma about ending life or trying to stay behind and rebuild society.

The traveller visualises the different types of mankind and ideas left on earth. The reader already knows about bad people and how much they are feared. However, through

conversations between the father, his son and himself it becomes clear that there are good people left. What the old man shows the reader is that ideas may differ even between good people. In their view of life, the old man and the wife have similarities, both are pessimistic about what will happen and they try to convince the man that he cannot protect or prepare for what will happen.

Another point that is illustrated through this dialogue is the issue of religion.

Throughout the narrative it is clear that the father has religious values and from the start it becomes evident that he regards his son as a religious character, able to save mankind. "He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke." McCarthy:4). The old man challenges the father's view of religion, shows another side to the theme of religion and in that sense brings up the view McCarthy himself has on religion. In the interview with Oprah Winfrey, when asked if he has "worked the God thing out" McCarthy himself explains: "It would depend on what day you ask me. I don't think you have to have a great idea of who or what God is in order to pray ... you can be quite doubtful about the whole business." (Michael, Colon 2007). It could be argued that through the dialogue between the old man and the father the different aspects of religion are brought up in relation to McCarthy's views. He does not think you need a God in order to pray, or at least a notion of who God is. What then arguably counts more for McCarthy, as mentioned in the introduction, is the good intentions of the religion and the principles that it holds towards how to live life.

Similar to the other dialogues in the movie almost all of the dialogue from the old man is kept. It is shortened and made more precise, but it conveys the same meaning to audience members. He is still a sceptic who thought it would happen, he does not believe in a god and takes pity on those who do.

Son and Stranger

After the death of the father there are a few dialogues between his son and a stranger whom he meets. Special to these dialogues is that the reader can note what the son takes with him from the education of his father. It becomes clear that there are still good people left. Even though the man says they are good the boy has to ask “Are you carrying the fire?” (McCarthy: 238). The stranger does not understand him in the first place, but later reassures the boy that they are good people. This almost seems good enough, but he brings up the matter of the little boy whom he saw previously and asks him if it is their son. He learns that it is theirs and upon learning that they do not eat children he decides to go with them. Or, as he says “Okay then” (McCarthy:239).

The dialogue is simple and similar to conversations father and son had after something dangerous has happened. The boy does not use many words or give away much. He is concerned if coming with the strangers is safe. When he gets an assurance, he decides to join them. Similarly, when his father assured him they were the good guys he started to talk more. The reader can assume that he will get along with them, but how conversations are between them we do get to know as it ends.

Hillcoat and Pennhall make it clear that the people the son joins in the end belong to the good guys. The woman explains that they followed both father and son trying to catch up. The boy spots the other boy he saw earlier and the camera shows tracks of a dog. There is no doubt about the good intentions of the family. Regardless, doubt remains if the boy will be all right or not. The movie ends with the boy staring, but not saying a word exactly the way it is described in the novel.

Conclusion

Compared to *No Country for Old Men* where dialogue has been cut down and other sides to character have been cut away, dialogue in *The Road* is much more maintained. One could argue that the characters created by Cormac McCarthy already were one sided and their dialogues did not give them much more. If there are any changes it is the mother and wife who is portrayed slightly more lovingly and caring towards her family. Yet, it is not through dialogue, but rather through mise-en-scene, camera angles and acting that her changed character is portrayed. It is an adaptation that maintains much of the dialogue and is very true to the novel, much more than in *No Country for Old Men*. Pennhal and Hillcoat have taken few liberties in diverting from the original and changes they made are more about the visual impact communicated to the audience. The changes strengthen the depiction of the apocalyptic world. Making it clearer to the audience and not leaving them to have second guesses about much.

One could argue though, that the affection between father and son is harder to grasp as the images are so strong and the dialogue so scarce for the viewer. In relation to the balance between the affection and brutality of the world, the use of voiceover from the father becomes fascinating. As I have already mentioned voiceover creates a distance for the audience. Therefore one could argue that the audience is distanced. Yes, the brutality seems less brutal, but to a certain extent so does the love between father and son.

CONCLUSION

Having looked closely at dialogues in novels and films there are a few trends that stand out in relation to the transfer from novel to film. It is important to remember that the novels are different and that this difference must be reflected in the adaptations.

When comparing the dialogue in the adapted version of *No Country for Old Men* one can find small changes. It is obviously shorter, but what is intriguing is how the thematic and content stays the same even though dialogues are cut. To a certain extent this is true.

Thematically *No Country for Old Men* keeps the focus from the novel. However, the argumentation behind the themes are not as easy to follow as most of it is left out. The audience gets little insight into what lies behind the madness of Chigurh. What lies behind the reluctance of Bell to stop Chigurh is not clear to the audience. What then is evident for the audience is a feeling of not being capable of dealing with evil, the good cannot triumph. I would argue that by cutting some of the dialogue, which tries to offer an insight into the philosophy behind good and evil, some of the McCarthyan style that Mark Holcomb talks about is lost. There is little room for the audience to assess the philosophy behind the thematic. Much of the debate about where society is going is lost.

Having said that, the adaptation is still a good one. It stays true to certain principles of the novel and deals with the same issues. Yes, they are intensified and simplified, but the Coen brothers mix mise-en-scene, soundtrack and dialogue well and stay true to the aspects of the story they have chosen to illustrate. One cannot fault dialogues in the movie either. Audiences who know the novel might feel they lack something, but the dialogue in *No Country for Old Men* is by no means poor. For instance, Roger Ebert commented on the scene at the gas station, “consider another scene in which the dialogue is as good as any you will hear this year” (Ebert: 2007). With all adaptations there is the issue of the unknowing and knowing audience, but as Linda Hutcheon points out “...even adaptations must stand on their

own” (Hutcheon 127). *No Country for Old Men* as an adaptation stands on its own, the dialogue works and even McCarthy himself felt it was true to the original novel. So both knowing and unknowing audiences should be satisfied with the Coen brother’s work. Indeed they were, as box office figures show us. I would still argue that the exclusion of certain elements of dialogue makes characters like Chigurh and Bell harder to understand for audiences. It affects the themes of the movie which thus gives the impression of a more conclusive triumph for evil over good. The Coen brothers have simplified the message of the novel while staying true to it.

The adaptation of *The Road* is more true to the dialogues, very little is left out and added from the original novel. Elements of different dialogues are merged together, as an adaptation normally does in order to create new ones, but the meaning of the original dialogue is still kept. One could argue that Joe Penhall had a simpler job compared to the Coen brothers in the process of writing the screenplay. Whereas the characters in *No Country for Old Men* represent different themes, they are still denser than it seems at first. Such complexity is elevated through the dialogue. In *The Road* the characters represent the themes, but are not as complex. There are also fewer characters which helps the dialogic process. The biggest problem in relation to dialogue and adaptation is how to solve the role of the father as a narrator. In the novel, he is the one who gives information about the world as it is and as it was. For large parts of the story, he is the stronger of the two. The problem for Penhall and Hillcoat is how to get this vital narration across to the audience. Boldly the choice has fallen on using voiceover. The voiceover functions to give insight into the world that is now, as a commentary from the father. It also functions as a comment to the world that was, as the father has experienced it but the flashbacks are put more into context for the audience. Crucially, the voiceover is not used during flashbacks, and dialogues between man and wife stand on their own. Voiceover before or after flashbacks makes the audience regard the

dialogue in a new light. For instance, before we witness the dialogue which ends with the wife taking her life, her husband's voiceover goes. "She was gone, and the coldness of it was her final gift...she dies somewhere in the dark...there is no other tale to tell" (Penhall 31). In a movie like *The Road*, voiceover is very effective. The cold landscape around, the audience not knowing how the world came to an end, long gaps before action, the melancholy mood and flashbacks of the old world work very well with a voiceover. Why Hillcoat and Penhall decided to go for a voiceover is hard to tell, but in relation to dialogue it is probably the most original concept for the movie. The concern of audience members (and therefore directors as well) is that voiceover explains what is being shown on the screen. However, in *The Road* the voiceover helps the characterisation, for instance in relation to the man: "Sometimes I tell the boy old stories of courage and justice - difficult as they are to remember. All I know is the child is my warrant and if he is not the word of God, then God never spoke" (Penhall 6). For the audience, voiceover is what first brings up the theme of religion and the love the man has for his son. This is not explained through dialogue between the two and religion through dialogue is not brought until they encounter the old man. Since the voiceover has told it to the audience, the audience knows the love is there. When the dialogue between the old man and the father about religion starts, we already know the fathers view on the matter.

Voiceover is helped by the audience not knowing how the world became destroyed. This brings up the question whether or not there is a difference between knowing and an unknowing audience in *The Road*. Arguably the voiceover will be regarded as too explanatory for an audience with knowledge of the novel, stating facts they already know. Hutcheon points out regarding knowing audiences and the narrative process, "in the process we inevitably fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text" (Hutcheon 121). Unknowing audiences will benefit more from the voiceover, it will offer them more in terms of narrative, events and characters. Hutcheon refers to

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the conflict between knowing and unknowing audience and how for an adapter it is easier to form a relationship with an unknowing audience "...it is probably easier for an adapter to forge a relationship with an audience that is not overly burdened with affection or nostalgia for the adapted text" (Hutcheon 121).

For the Coen brothers and Hillcoat working with adapted texts by McCarthy has been relatively easy. For one thing, even though he is famous, the plays of Shakespeare will have a much larger knowing audience (the list is long with others as well, J.R.R Tolkien and J.K. Rowling, to mention some) On the other hand, the attitude McCarthy himself has to the creative freedom of the director is great. As Hillcoat mentions in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* and McCarthy himself: "You relieved a huge burden from my shoulders when you said, 'Look, a novel's a novel and a film's a film, and they're very different'" (Jurgensen 2009). As McCarthy says regarding the relationship he had with the Coen brothers and *No Country for Old Men*: "We met and chatted a few times. I enjoyed their company. They're smart and they're very talented. Like John, they didn't need any help from me to make a movie" (Jurgensen 2009).

Although *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* are adaptations and have cut down or altered the dialogues, meaning behind the dialogue is maintained. They may be more one sided for the audience compared to the original, but this is what adaptations are about: taking a certain element of something and extracting it for a larger audience on the screen. If you adapt a novel page by page, you will end up with such a long film that the audience will be bored. Indeed, if adaptations are to stand on their own, so must the dialogue in the adaptations. And in the end dialogues in both *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* work.

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